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TORONTO

THE ENGLISH VILLAGE

A LITERARY STUDY

1750-1850

BY

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“I doe love these ancient villages:
We never tread upon them but we set
Our foote upon some reverend historie.”



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TO
CARL SAFFORD PATTON
ANNE PATTON SIMPSON

PREFACE

WHEN all the world is in the turmoil and distress of war, it may appear a petty self-indulgence for one to go wandering about among the pleasant and retired paths of rural villages, seeking one's ease in

"country places
Where the old plain men have rosy faces,"

hearing unlettered but keen and wise old peasant folk tell tales of life and of superstitious fancy, looking on at village festivals, and sharing in all the joys of Arcadia. "What has all this to do with the war?" demands the Conscientious Objector of Mr. Crothers at the close of a delightful but very peaceful essay. Mr. Crothers meets the Objector fairly, recognizing in the imperative question the challenge of a world absorbed in a single all-consuming interest.

But the English village has a very great deal to do with the war. For remote as the sleepy stillness of village life is, in ordinary times, from the hurry of active affairs, there is not one among the most distant and old-world of English villages but has been stirred out of its quiet by the great war. The villagers of England have been swept into the mid-current of national life by the events of the past four years. They have taken a splendid part in the great struggle, and their interests and concerns have in turn become in a new sense those of all England. For a century and a half certain great problems of village life have been growing in seriousness, and pressing with more and more insistence for attention and solution. It is inconceivable that after the war these problems should continue long unsolved.

Literature has given to these more serious phases of village life an attention, not equal, indeed, to that bestowed upon its idyllic aspects, but yet fairly continuous and sympathetic. English prose and poetry for the cen-

tury between 1750 and 1850, therefore, presents not merely a village of Arcadia, but an English village in which conditions were developing that are just now reaching their culmination and approaching their settlement, and that are given a new significance by the war itself.

In the present study the literature of the Scottish village has been taken into account because of its close relation to that of the English village, while the Irish, because of its greater remoteness, has been disregarded. The notably rich literature of village life which has developed in America, has obviously, in spite of its intrinsic interest, no place in a study of the village of England.

The writer is conscious of obligations beyond the power of a Preface to express, much less repay. Indebtedness to printed authorities is acknowledged in the proper places in the text, but the invaluable aid supplied by the kindly interest and encouragement of friends can not be so easily and explicitly recognized, and must go with a general though most grateful acknowledgement. In particular the writer is indebted to her friends Miss Judith Williams and Mrs. Rebecca Lowrie for generous interest and helpful criticism; to Professor Jefferson B. Fletcher for the initial suggestion of the subject and a cordial interest in its treatment; and especially to Professor Ashley H. Thorndike for the stimulus of his broad scholarship no less than for his keen and constructive criticism.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

MANY books deal with the village in a popular way and from differing points of view. There are, for example, the various "antiquities" of particular localities; descriptive and antiquarian books such as those of Rev. P. H. Ditchfield, with their chatty style and their attractive illustrations; and the essays of a naturalist like Richard Jefferies. A short list of works of importance from the historical and economic point of view is appended.

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THE ENGLISH VILLAGE

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY: THE POINT OF VIEW

It may pretty safely be said that all the world loves a village. Everybody feels the charm of the "little town." Not to live in, necessarily: one may love it as Newman is said to have loved children, "in idea." But there is something essentially appealing in the village "idea" to which few people are indifferent,—something small and intimate and endearing. Close to humanity and close to nature is the village, and small enough to be grasped imaginatively, as a city with its vast complex of interests and institutions and activities can not be. The city impresses and excites, arouses admiration and wonder; it may command a passionate loyalty or kindle a high ambition; it assuredly calls upon the very depths of human sympathy and compassion. But the mood it inspires is not that felt at mention of a village. It was some

"little town by river or sea shore,
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,"

that Keats saw emptied of its folk to sacrifice, one pious morn, "in Tempe or the dales of Arcady." And that little town, its streets evermore silent, with none to return and tell why it is desolate, appeals to us as a living thing. The spirit of the life which has animated it still haunts its empty houses and its silent streets. All that is lovely in village life is evoked by the tone almost of affection that colors the few lines commemorating it.

The same cherishing, as of something small and precious, in Phillips Brooks'

"O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!"

creates an instant responsive mood. London asleep, seen from Westminster Bridge, is a sight "touching in its majesty;" little Bethlehem in its "deep and dreamless sleep,"—and the "white sleeping town" for which Margaret deserted her Merman and her little sea-children,—these are appealing in their smallness. However beautiful the spires of a great cathedral rising from the midst of a city, they awaken a very different emotion from that kindled by the white-walled town, with its "narrow pav'd streets, where all is still," and its "little grey church on the windy hill."

And not merely in poetry, where it is touched by the grace of the poet's imagination and the beauty of his music, but in the homely life of every-day reality, the village has a charm for men. How has our indignation been fired by the thought of the ruined villages of France, the dispossessed villagers and their uprooted lives! Every such village speaks to us of beauty desecrated, of a happy community broken, of the most elemental human feelings violated. Our memories linger over the unspoiled beauty of English villages, with their unbroken allegiance to the past and their ancient peace still undisturbed,—destroyed now for generations, perhaps forever. And those prosaic little communities which our own American childhood and youth have known with an intimacy past any possibility of glamor, and which we modestly call "small towns" rather than by the more poetic name of village, these too have their charm, the charm of a familiar homeyness impossible to a large town or city.

It is said that Mr. George Ade once replied to a question concerning some particular distance, "Oh, it's about as far as from the station to the Methodist church." To be sure! Just a good easy distance,—we all know the "feel" of it. To the small town resident Mr. Ade's terms are absolutes; they need no translation, unless indeed someone prefers "from Anderson's corner to the Baptist church," or some other such quick and easy equivalent.

The weekly newspaper of a small town in Michigan recently contained an item something like this: "John Eaton died last week in Cincinnati. Only Dr. Martin

will remember him now, probably, but the Editor recalls how John and he used to 'play hookey' together and splash around in the old swimmin' hole down at Otisco." The Editor was writing from the little Michigan town; John Eaton had died in Cincinnati; Dr. Martin has lived for at least twenty-five years in Seattle. Yet the reader in New York City felt that all three were neighbors, just around the corner, as they used to be.

There is the essence of the thing,—an essence which Mr. Rupert Hughes strangely misses in the *Foreword* to his book of short stories *In a Little Town*. "It is an immortal imbecility," says Mr. Hughes, "to treat little towns as if they were essentially different from big towns. Cities are not Ninevehs and Babylons any more than little towns are Arcadias or Utopias. They do small towns a grievous injustice who deny them restlessness, vice, ostentation, cruelty: as they do cities a grievous injustice who deny them simplicity, homeliness, friendship, and contentment." To this one can only say, daring the charge of imbecility, that little towns *are*, none the less, essentially different from big towns, though the difference is not that which Mr. Hughes repudiates as commonly assigned to them. It is precisely because the fundamental qualities of human nature, both good and bad, exhibit themselves under the peculiar modifications of the small community and produce a community life with a distinctive quality of its own, that the village is of perennial interest. It need not be Auburn: it may even be Spoon River; but it is not New York or Pittsburgh or Kansas City.

In a sense the village has never been absent from English literature. Its pointed spire and thatched cottages, its tavern and smithy, have always been somewhere discernible in the literary landscape. But in the eighteenth century it came into a new position in literature which it has ever since retained. Before that time rustics, numerous enough since Chaucer and *Piers Plowman*, had appeared as single figures, often indeed merely as types representative of social classes; now the whole community, a social group in its setting, was introduced, and

individuals appeared as members of the group. Shakespeare's rustics do not suggest the villages to which they must have belonged; there is no *Deserted Village*, or *Favourite Village*, or *Village Oppressed* in the sixteenth century. The eighteenth century shows the handling of a theme distinctly new, only hinted at in earlier periods and reached through the course of a long development, by various lines of approach and under diverse influences, literary and social. In the third quarter of the century the village in this sense became a literary fashion, and a fashion of more significance than at first appears.

On the social side the appearance of the new theme is an almost unmarked expression of a sweeping social change, itself only recently recognized in its real importance to English history,—that is, the disappearance of the old English village. On the literary side it is a distinct element in the upspringing of that "romantic" spirit that marked a literary epoch. The theme in its later development served as one expression for perhaps the most important and far reaching movement of nineteenth century thought, the growth of the idea and ideal of democracy. It afforded one field for the fighting of the battle of idealism versus realism, and it contributed to the general literary stock certain elements that have entered into some of the most characteristic work of nineteenth century literature, from the poetry of Wordsworth to that of Masefield, Rupert Brooke, and Edgar Lee Masters, from *Cranford* to stories of the Five Towns and *Ethan Frome*. And its influence is still unspent.

There are a good many reasons for this persistence. In the first place, the mediaeval English village, in spite of the germiness of its thatched roofs and the stuffiness of its ill ventilated cottages, was to the eye a thing of wonderful picturesqueness and beauty, and quite naturally formed a part of the picture of England which the landscape poets were sketching during the eighteenth century. Moreover, the same spirit that leads to the poetic treatment of nature leads easily to the poetic treatment of man as against a background of nature and under natural influences rather than in a distinctively social setting.

This combination of natural beauty with human interest has a strong appeal, both in its more superficial aspects and in its inner significance. Again, rustic people offer peculiarly attractive opportunities for the study of human nature: they stand out sharply, their individuality not effaced by convention; they offer picturesqueness and pathos and humor; they have a raciness of the soil in both speech and ideas.

The "classic" pastoral, with its prettiness and its unreality, and with all the absurdities of some of its aspects, has given an impression of superficiality that is easily associated with all poetry of rural life. Nothing could be more false than the notion that rural life is in itself shallow. Ambition and accomplishment or defeat, courage, despair, honor, love, hatred,—these are the stuff of life anywhere, and are found in peasant people in clear and often striking manifestation. Wordsworth's deliberate choice of humble life as the subject for his art came from his perception of the depth and concentration, as well as clear expression, of the essential human passions among peasant people. Too often the life of the country and the countryman has been superficially treated and nothing but the outward show of it given, and that with conventionality and falseness, but the depths have now and then been sounded. Sometimes it has been in idyllic form, as in the *Vicar of Wakefield*; sometimes in a bare narrative of bitter experience underneath an outwardly quiet life, as in Wordsworth's *Michael*. The dramatic contrast of idyllic appearance and tragic reality appears in its very essence in the ironic title, *Far from the Madding Crowd*. But Hardy has given us also the genuine idyll *Under the Greenwood Tree*, with not more than a hint of underlying seriousness. Arcadia was a pretense, but *Michael* is not more real than Dr. Primrose. Crabbe's *Village* and Miss Mitford's *Village* are equally true.

We seem here to be identifying villager with peasant, and village with country. But this is truer for England than an American finds it easy to remember. With us a village is not at all to be confused with the country-side; it is the center upon which a farming community draws,

perhaps, or it is a small industrial center. In England villages are closer together, and "country life" practically always involves close association with some village. Historically the typical village was an agricultural community, a group of farmers holding and working their land together, and the connection between the village and "the Land" is still very close. In literature the industrial has never supplanted the agricultural village; *Cranford* is probably the most notable instance of an industrial village made the subject of literary treatment. Hence it is that a study of the English village becomes almost inevitably a study of the English peasant and English country life.

But the peasant has never lived alone in his village. In Saxon "town" and Norman manor Hodge has always had his lord, and the Squire is as much a part of the village as the cottager. Historically the term Squire has two significations. In its earlier sense it indicated a feudal relationship, and belonged to the system of which villeinage was a part. Later it came to be applied to the Justice of the Peace, whose power was not feudal but official. Professor Jenks, in his *Outline of English Local Government*,* points out that, while literature speaks of the Squire as the "God Almighty of the country-side," the Squire was not so *qua* Squire, but *qua* Justice of the Peace. If removed by government from the Commission of the Peace his power was gone; the first great blow at the position of the Squire was the clearing him, not of his acres, but of his powers as Justice. Yet the term Squire has retained (as indeed these remarks themselves imply) much of its ancient coloring, since in the relation of the country gentleman and his tenantry something of the old feudal character has persisted. The two-fold meaning of the term needs to be borne in mind in the reading of village literature.

Again, the relation of village to parish is often a puzzling question, partly because of the fact that the parish is both an ecclesiastical and a secular unit of government.

* Edward Jenks: *An Outline of English Local Government*, sec. ed. (reprinted) 1914.

Since 1601, when the charge of the poor was given over to the parish, many things have become parochial in administration,—bridges, drainage, highways, police, education,—and as need has demanded, new parishes have been created, and parishes with particular functions established, not always coinciding with the old ecclesiastical units. Constant mention of church, parish, vestry, tithes, and so on, in the literature of the village indicates that the church was the center and heart of village life. And so it was, but not as a purely religious body. This very complication of secular and ecclesiastical in government and administration, with the fact that for many centuries the religious instinct found expression only through the medium of the established church, wrought the church very close into the texture of village life, and gave the “parson” an authority in which no villager would have cared, even if he had been able, to differentiate the temporal and spiritual elements.*

The field of the village in literature is not much more clearly defined than some of these terms involved in it. The boundary lines between village on the one side and farm, parish, and town on the other are indeterminate. And the point of view for its study is equally unfixed. A purely literary investigation would have regard primarily to literary origins, relations, and developments, but such a study would miss many of the implications of greatest interest and value in the subject matter. In the eighteenth century grew up a new literature of the village; we can trace its literary antecedents, but far more striking than any such facts are the facts of actual village life in the eighteenth century. From this point of view the

* Some of these facts of definition and relation are illustrated interestingly by George Bourne in the opening paragraphs of his *Change in the Village*, London, 1912. He is dealing, he says, with a parish rather than a real village, since the community he describes never had a corporate history of its own. It has no central green; no squire ever lived in it; until within thirty years it never had a resident parson. That is to say, it had not a manorial origin, and it was connected with the parish as with a secular governing body, not a religious institution. It was, as Bourne goes on to explain, a village begun by squatters, probably about the middle of the eighteenth century.

history of English village literature since 1750 becomes a chapter in the social history of England, and it is from this point of view that the present study is written. Doubtless this method of approach will involve the laying of a primary emphasis upon the economic aspect of the subject, but not, it is hoped, with unfairness to other considerations equally a part of that life of which this literature was at once the product and the expression. Especially are the facts of literary history to be taken into due account.

In this study, therefore, village literature connects itself on the one side with conventions of the pastoral and Georgic; with heroic couplet and English prose and new verse forms; with eighteenth century sentimentalism and the romantic movement. On the other side it connects itself with the growth of a democratic spirit in an aristocratic age; with two great movements, the industrial revolution and the less familiar but almost more fundamental agrarian revolution. It brings us into contact with national questions such as that of the English poor, of which the case of villagers presents only one phase,—“just the country half of what we know in London,” as Nedda Freeland said.* It involves the great “land question” with which the whole world is today concerned as never before, and the settling of which bids fair to hold a first place in the efforts of many nations for many decades to follow the conclusion of the war.

In historical and economic research the study of the village is relatively new; all books of importance on the subject belong to the last ten or twelve years. Social history waited long for political history to lose its first claim to the attention of writers and readers, and the village, perhaps because of our prevailing industrial civilization, only slowly approached the city as a topic of general public interest and study. More and more pressing, however, did the events of village history make themselves felt in the national life, until they forced attention to the village, and economists and historians have

* John Galsworthy, *The Freelands*.

now told the story fully. How far imaginative literature parallels the account of history, how far the revelation of national spirit which it affords may hold explanation for the course of outer events, is the question here to be asked.

CHAPTER II

FROM THE MEDIÆVAL VILLAGE TO THE MODERN

DESPITE the ravages of railroad and automobile, there still lingers about the typical little English village an air of great antiquity to which hardly the most frivolous or the most dull can be insensitive. The American observer perhaps feels it the more keenly from its very absence in his own home experience. A New England village of the Deerfield type, with its quiet, elm-shaded street, its beautiful old doorways, its quaint church, its memorials of Indian war-fare, has indeed a voice to speak of generations gone. But the early day of which it tells is still not so remote as to be more than hazy with distance, and its air of antiquity is disturbed by the very deliberateness and sophistication with which its past is preserved. A village of the American plains, with its square outline, its right-angled streets, its rows of quick-growing soft-maple trees, its few stores (including a "five-and-ten"), and its smart brick church and school-house, seems wholly of the present. Three or four generations cover the record of its past. Still farther west, and the village finds its chief glory in its newness, in the achievements of its frontier and pioneer experience. The days when it was carved out of the wilderness or reclaimed from the desert are still remembered by the elders among its people. To all these—and to the newest not least—attaches an abundant human interest, but not the oldest of them can claim the distinctive charm of age which belongs by inalienable right to the village of England.

Though in many English villages the external signs of age are growing fewer, the village quiet disturbed by an intruding and alien world, its thatched cottages replaced by yellow brick, its pastures and meadows turned to golf courses, yet in many secluded spots the old beauty still lingers, and the village that will always live in literature

“embosom’d soft in trees” does also in fact still nestle among the hills or straggle along the water courses, its ancient cottages, “weathered and colored by sun and wind and rain and many lowly vegetable forms to a harmony with nature,” as close akin to the trees and rivers and meadows about them as the old Cumberland leech-gatherer to the inanimate world in which he moved. And even where this beauty has given way to the ugliness of box-shaped, slate-roofed, modern-looking cottages, with their full provision of comfort and their utter denial of charm, even here a closer knowledge of the village will reveal unexpected signs of an immemorial antiquity. Perhaps the modern inn retains a quaint old name, attesting a history that stretches back into mediæval days,—a name, for example, like that of the old Berkshire inn, The Five Alls, with its epitomized experience of centuries:

I rule all	—King
I pray for all	—Bishop
I plead for all	—Barrister
I fight for all	—Soldier
I pay for all	—Farmer

Or the village church, repaired and “improved” quite out of its original simplicity, still boasts its ancient tower, which has defied the hostility of time and speaks plainly of the past. Old proverbs and folk-sayings color the speech of the villagers, pleasing the ear with their racy quaintness and giving involuntary expression to an accumulated wisdom beyond that of the individual speakers. Year after year the villagers plant their gardens and sow their fields in unvarying adherence to the order bequeathed them by their fathers and in a dim but satisfying sense of alliance with those past generations of men and women in whose steps they are following. Quaint old songs, cherished festival customs, ancient superstitions,—innumerable links connect the village of today with the village of long ago, and give constant reminder of its past. It is only in the light of this long history that the literature of the English village can be rightly read.*

* This inseparable connection with the past is tellingly presented by Bourne in his *Change in the Village*. “Out of all these circumstances

From beginnings too dim to be traced with any certainty, up to the days of all too certain stress and change in the latter half of the eighteenth century, the history of the English village was the fairly continuous development of a system which may be epitomized in the word "community." For the present generation this term has almost faded to mere "neighborhood;" "common" now denotes a cricket field or a court-house yard, some sort of reservation of ground for public use or recreation, ordinarily in or near a city or large town, where such reservation is so imperative that it may be successfully wrested from grudging authorities. For centuries, however, the principle involved in these words was the very heart of the social system which centered in the village; it was not a concession to the people by authorities or upper classes, it was the foundation of rural society. Whatever the origin of the village in the earliest folk history of the English people,* at least so far back as certain knowledge carries us, this community of life is at its heart. Although it seems probable that there was never a time in England when the agricultural village was the only type in existence, that centering about a military post, or burh, being probably of equal antiquity, yet the typical village was a community of

[of the past] . . . there proceeded an influence which acted upon the village people as an unperceived guide to their conduct, so that they observed the seasons proper for their various pursuits almost as if they were going through some ritual." (P. 122.) An old widow-woman of the village once lost for a moment her habitual fortitude and allowed herself to describe the hopelessness of her position. Then she smiled: "Well, 'tis only for life. If 'twas for longer than that I don't know if we should hardly be able to bear it." Bourne comments: "If you have an ear for a folk-saying, you will recognize one there in that 'only for life' of hers. Be sure that a by-word so compact as that was not one old woman's invention. To acquire such brevity and smoothness it must have been wandering around the parish for years; and when it reached me at last it had been polished by the despair of hundreds of other people, as a coin is polished by passing through hundreds of hands." (P. 63.)

* The question of origin is a controversial one which fortunately does not concern the present study. The few sentences here which glance at the early development of the English village follow the conclusions of Vinogradoff as presented by J. L. and Barbara Hammond: *The Village Labourer, 1760-1832*, Lon. 1911, p. 27.

farmers, and a study of it brings us at once into an examination of the mediæval system of agriculture.

A brief treatment cannot hope to give more than the merest outline of a system covering many centuries in time and varying with both time and place, as did the agricultural village of mediæval England. The communal village goes back to Celtic and Anglo-Saxon times, long ante-dating the manorial system, and it lived on after feudalism disappeared. For example, the "vestry" of post-feudal days is in reality the early English "town meeting," under a name borrowed from the church organization which in the progress of intervening centuries had grown up and become interlinked with the secular organization of society.* In different parts of England the types of village community were quite distinct, and in each type the system was intricate and complex, and subject to innumerable local variations. But all these differences of time and place are of outer detail rather than of inner principle, and for the purposes of this study a brief sketch, generalized as to both time and place, will serve. The facts are not new; they need only to be recalled.

The very look of the mediæval village suggested by one striking feature the essential difference between the early and the modern type. The early village was not set in fields enclosed by beautiful hedges or picturesque stone walls, but lay almost wholly open and without enclosing barriers. To an approaching traveller the village first announced itself by its steeple rising from the trees, and by its dark-timbered and red-roofed old manor house. Adjoining these stretched the glebe of the parson and the home-farm of the lord, the latter a continuous block of cultivated land with barns, stables, and dwellings for steward and manorial servants. Close to the manor lay the village proper, its farm-houses and cottages clustering together or set unevenly along the single straggling road, and its fields disposed in a curiously irregular pattern, three or four large patches of land crossed and streaked

* See Edward Jenks, *An Outline of English Local Government*, sec. ed., 1907, pp. 21-22.

by long strips of cultivated ground five or six yards in width, separated by narrower strips of grass. Somewhere within the pattern lay an expanse of waste and a stretch of wood-land. The small enclosed fields of our modern landscape indicate individual ownership and operation of land; this open, "champaign"—or, as the English have characteristically made it, "champion"—territory was the outer and visible sign of a genuine community life. The mediæval village, again, was not a center from which the needs of an outlying farming region might be supplied; it was itself a community of farmers, gathered together originally in unsettled and dangerous times for mutual protection,* and still a complete, independent, and practically self-supporting community.

Within the village land was owned, in our sense of the word, by three classes among the inhabitants, the lord of the manor, owners to whom various portions had at different times been sold by the lord, and free-holders, who possessed absolute, immemorial claim to their tenement. In addition land was held by copyhold (a claim recorded in some state paper and held under restrictions there stipulated); or by annual rent; or by some form of tenure depending on tenement within the village;† or by sufferance of the lord, as in the case of squatters. A village might belong to many owners or to few, but in either case the land was commonly let out to a number of small men.‡ All the village land under cultivation as "arable" was disposed, in accordance with the prevailing system of agriculture, in three or four large fields, each divided as just described into the long narrow strips which constituted the "holdings" of individual villagers. One man's

* E. C. K. Gonner, *Common Land and Enclosure*, Lon. 1912, p. 34.

† For example, some villages contained "tofts," or cottages residence in which carried the right to a certain amount of land and to "common rights"; these cottages commanded an especially high rent. Gilbert Slater, *The English Peasantry and the Enclosure of Common Fields*, Lon. 1907, p. 10.

‡ Stanwell, in Middlesex, a typical eighteenth century village, had four large proprietors, twenty-four moderate proprietors, twenty-four small proprietors, and sixty-six cottagers with common rights. Hammond, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

land was frequently distributed in widely scattered strips among the three village fields.* In addition to the arable fields there was the meadow, divided by lot and pegged off in divisions corresponding to the holdings in arable. The forests, and also the waste, or "common," upon which the domestic animals of the village grazed together, belonged to the lord, subject to certain rights possessed by the villagers.

This arrangement of land is explained by the system of agriculture from and with which it developed. In each locality the system was definitely prescribed by vote of the villagers but in accordance with the tradition of unnumbered centuries. Typically it was a three-year course of cultivation: that is, the arable was divided into three fields, with rotating crops, each field being devoted one year to wheat, the next to other grains and legumes, and the third year lying fallow.

"Oats, pease, beans, and barley grows,
You nor I nor nobody knows
Where oats, pease, beans, and barley grows,"

runs the old rhyme in the children's game, in curious reminiscence of this agricultural scheme. Evidently the jingle has been distorted by time, since in fact everybody did once know that "oats, pease, beans, and barley" grew in one of the three village fields. Whatever holdings a man had within a particular field he was obliged to devote to the crop determined by the general course for that field in any particular year. No change in the course could be made except by general consent, which was never easily secured. The system was conducted under the direction of officers chosen by popular vote, and every man was expected to serve his turn in all the various

* "The writer of the *Report on Middlesex*, which was published in 1798 says, 'I have known thirty landlords in a field of 200 acres, and the property of each so divided as to lie in ten or twenty places, containing from an acre or two downwards to fifteen perches; and in a field of 300 acres I have met with patches of arable land, containing eight perches each. In this instance the average size of all the pieces in the field was under an acre. In all cases they lie in long, narrow, winding or wormlike slips.'" Hammond, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

offices made necessary in any locality by its own particular conditions.

Inwrought with this system of agriculture was the system of common rights.* Specifically each common right included one vote in the general village meetings (sometimes called toft meetings), one share in the money revenues derived from the sale of grass on the "balks," or dividing strips of turf in the common fields, and prescribed rights of pasturage on the fallow field, on the waste, and in the meadow after the hay was gathered. Farm servants were housed and fed by their masters; practically every other inhabitant, even the farm laborer, had enough land about his cottage to supply the immediate needs of his family, and the right of pasturage on the lord's waste for as many beasts as he could feed during the winter. Moreover all the villagers possessed other rights only less essential to the cottager's welfare, chiefly the "common of estover," or right to wood from the lord's forests for fuel, building, and the repair of implements, and the "common of turbary," or right to turf, peat, or furze for fuel. Many other rights were enjoyed by special grant, or possessed by only certain members of the community, and were not a necessary part of the system of life; but the three fundamental rights of pasture, estover, and turbary formed in themselves "an intricate mesh of mutual privileges and obligations," so that disturbance at one point meant disturbance to the whole.

The conduct of village affairs was also communal. On several occasions during the year the commoners met for the settling of affairs of public interest. They discussed matters of the order or variation of crops; they elected the Foreman of the Fields, to give notice when the fields were open for pasture, and a Field Jury, to settle disputes

* The word "common" is variously used: "common fields" are arable and meadow lands; "the common" is the waste land of the village; "common rights" may mean merely the rights of pasturage on the common, or may be used as equivalent to "rights of common," that is, various particular rights pertaining to a communal system of land holding and cultivation. Holders of common rights are "commoners." Some toft-heads carried rights of common but not holdings in arable.

among individuals as to field concerns; they appointed a common shepherd, a pinner to look after stray cattle, a chimney peeper to keep in condition the chimneys of the village as a protection against fire, and sundry other minor officials whom the affairs of the particular locality called for. The mill belonged to the lord, and every villager brought to it his share of grain, however large or small, to be ground, paying for the privilege in money or services. The whole economy of the village was like a partnership, in which a farm was owned and operated by a group of persons holding a varying number of shares.

All these things made for a solidarity in the village community which was furthered by its practical isolation during many months of the year, when roads were almost impassable, and by its almost complete independence and self-sufficiency. Each village had its artisans, who belonged to the cottage class and possessed their share of land and of common rights, to supplement the income derived from their special industries. Although during the middle ages various industries tended to become localized in particular centers, they were still carried on largely in cottages, and fundamental industries such as spinning and weaving went on in almost every cottage of the land.* Every village raised its own food, made its own clothes and utensils, and conducted its own government, both temporal and spiritual, with very little call upon the outside world.

* See Miss Davies' interesting description of Corsley, a Wiltshire village, which was given over to the cloth-making industry; it contained few houses, from that of the yeoman farmer to the laborer's cottage, which were without their looms. The village bears outward signs of this former activity in the long weaving sheds at the back of the houses, or the long, low weaver's windows in the cottages themselves. Cloth-making and agriculture went on together in the village, a capitalist clothier being frequently a farmer, and the peasants combining small farming or gardening with their weaving. (Davies, Maude F., *Life in an English Village*, Lon., 1909.)

Cunningham remarks that it is possible that in the 17th century the domestic organization of industries developed more than the capitalistic; in the 18th and 19th centuries the opposite was of course true. (Cunningham, W., *The Growth of English Industry and Commerce in Modern Times*, Camb. Univ. Press, 1907.)

Thanks to this system of common rights, and to the possession of a bit of land on the part of every cottager, the mediæval village had no large proletarian class, dependent solely on daily wages for sustenance. Least secure in its position was the class of squatters (occasionally called borderers), those inhabitants who built their houses on the waste or along the road-side, and held them only on sufferance of the lord. They established their residence at the outset by "key-hole" tenure (that ancient traditional right which folk-lorists trace back to the worship of the domestic hearth), that is, by scrambling together in one night enough of a house so that morning might see smoke issuing from the new chimney.* Though there was no technical recognition of the squatter's right, such a house was by ancient practice secure from molestation, and its occupant was permitted to pasture his cow and his few geese upon the common.†

Cottagers, distinguished from free-holders and copy-holders in being annual renters without further claim to their cottages, and from small tenant farmers in that their main living was made by labor for others rather than in the cultivation of their own land, formed a considerable part of the population of any village. Though they were day-laborers, their bits of garden and their rights of common, with sometimes small holdings in arable, gave them a degree of independence unknown to a really proletarian class. It was their children who became house servants, saving up money until they were able to buy a little stock and rent a small cottage, then setting themselves up in life after the manner of their parents. To these young people the right of pasturage

* Gomme, George Lawrence, *The Village Community*, Lon. 1890, p. 128.

† Sometimes a colony of squatters, encouraged by the lord of the manor, attained a rather high degree of prosperity, appropriating considerable land, building good cottages, acquiring cattle and other stock, and maintaining themselves with very little help from the parish, sometimes being themselves assessed to the poor-rate. Arthur Young describes some such instances (see Hasbach, *A History of the English Agricultural Labourer*, Lon. 1908, p. 77). The village described by Bourne in his *Change in the Village* was of this origin. In other instances squatters were pronounced lazy and thievish and a menace to the neighborhood. Villagers with common rights ordinarily resented their intrusion.

was of supreme importance, since it afforded them their main chance of getting ahead.* Above the cottagers were the free-holders, and above them the small farmers, with copy-holders forming a connecting link between the two. Intermediate between free-holders and tenant farmers on the one hand and small gentry on the other was that indefinite class called yeomen, the large number of whom Adam Smith pronounced the strength and the distinction of English agriculture.†

In each case the lower class of villagers thus passed by imperceptible gradation into the higher. Between cottagers and farmers, for example, social differences were marked only by the farmer's possession of more property and a larger house, and his necessity of employing labor for his assistance. His laborers and he worked together, ate the same kind of food, spoke the same dialect, and shared the same interests and store of knowledge. There was nothing in the whole scheme of things to prevent any man of enterprise and native ability from rising from a lower position to a higher. In doing this, indeed, he did not leave his own social class, but simply made himself more comfortable and more influential where he was. The absence of sharp social distinctions, the independence, yet interdependence within a co-operative system, of all members of the community, the wholesome diversity of employment afforded by the absence of specialization in labor,‡ the sense of security in ancient rights and an an-

* See the interesting anonymous poem *Snaith Marsh* (*post*, p. 227).

† The term yeoman was originally applied to a free-holder with an income of forty shillings a year from hereditary property; later it was extended to include tenant farmers and gentleman farmers, and sometimes copy-holders. Hasbach, *op. cit.*, p. 38, foot-note. For a clear treatment of free-holders, copy-holders, yeomen, etc., see Hasbach, p. 71 ff., and Hammond, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-32.

‡ Bourne finds various evidences of the pleasure afforded by this variety of work, both wage-earning and otherwise; "in the elaborate tile-work of old cottage roofs, in the decorated iron-work of decrepit farm waggons, in the carefully fashioned field gates" are proofs that the artisans of old time worked placidly and unhurriedly: ploughing and harvesting leave no trace, but there is suggestiveness in such little things as "the friendly behaviour of carter-men to their horses, and the accomplished finish given to the thatch of ricks, and the endearing names

cient order, the possibility of recognition for individual qualities of thrift and intelligence, an out-door life and simple living,—all these things made for the cultivation of a peasantry of sturdiness and strength and self-reliance.

But this is a generalized picture. At no time was every villager in every part of England either altogether good or altogether happy. Even under a co-operative system of life human nature is subject to jealousy, to laziness and negligence, even to more serious frailties of the flesh and spirit. As George Eliot says, the selfish instincts are not subdued by the sight of buttercups, and something more is needed to make a man moral than to turn him out to grass. The old village economy did in truth supply more than this; despite some conspicuous disadvantages to be noted more particularly later, it supplied what was on the whole a favorable medium for the development of certain important qualities of character, but it provided no millennium or golden age.

Furthermore, independent as each village was in most regards, it could not remain wholly outside the current of national events or untouched by national development. The increase of trade at home and the development of foreign relations; the shifting, under these conditions and as the result of such events as the Great Plague of the 14th century, from arable to sheep-farming; the growth of cities as industrial centers, making a varying demand upon the resources of the country as a whole; the transference of masses of property, such as occurred on the closing of the monasteries under Henry the Eighth; attempts made in accordance with ideas brought home from foreign travel to effect changes in the established system of production,—all these things and many other influences prevented English rural life from remaining a fixed and unchanging thing. It was on the contrary constantly under change, but change for the most part slow and general, and only in certain crises rapid enough

which people in out-of-the-way places still bestow upon their cows." Such things bespeak a people habitually happy and unharassed. *Op. cit.*, p. 120.

to be attended by acute disturbance to the comfort and well-being of villagers.

Among all the forces for change, one stands out supreme,—enclosure. In essence enclosure is the surrounding of open land with ditches, hedges, or other barriers, as the sign of individual, exclusive ownership instead of common possession and use. The enclosure of commons is a familiar matter of public concern in these present days, when city-dwellers are frequently thrown into dismay at the threat of the enclosure of their recreation grounds. The historic movement of the enclosure of common fields has been, however, a matter of much greater national concern. In the early days of England when each village was surrounded by a large expanse of unclaimed territory, the need of a growing population for more land, or the greed of a manorial lord for more power and wealth, could be satisfied readily. But when this condition ceased to exist, such need or greed had to be met by appropriating to individual use and control lands formerly held in common. Whether barriers were erected to separate a portion of arable for the purpose of conversion into pasture, or a portion of pasture land for conversion into arable, enclosure meant change from commonalty to severalty of ownership.

It is evident that in a partnership such as the mediæval village represented, the sudden taking over of all shares by one or two of the partners, leaving the others with no available investment for their little capital, would mean nothing short of catastrophe to the small partners. If it could be done slowly enough to allow provision for the interests of the smaller men, undoubtedly the change might be of benefit to the larger public concerned,—the business might be managed more expeditiously, economically, and progressively. In part, this latter is what happened in the matter of English land, though it must be added that the greed and ambition of the stronger had constantly to be held in check for the protection of the weaker, and at two periods broke all bounds and worked devastation to small holders. More's *Utopia* is the lasting monument to the first of these periods of calamity;

the second, more sweeping and final in its effects, had a less signal commemoration, though one perhaps not less expressive of the general lament.

The recognition of a national danger from the land greed of manorial lords was evidenced by the first act of parliament against enclosure and eviction, passed in 1490. The *Utopia* recorded the same protest in 1516. Yet the movement progressed rapidly through the 16th century, unchecked by the Justices of the Peace, who were themselves of the land-lord class and not deeply interested in the enforcement of laws against enclosure.* Poverty increased, and at the closing of the monasteries the State was obliged to take over from the Church the care of its poor, and then was inaugurated that system of poor-relief which was to continue with modifications until it had grown so far from its original form that the "new poor law" of 1834 was enacted as a return to the poor law of Elizabeth. One of its early provisions, passed in 1589 and in force, theoretically at least, until 1775, purposed to arrest the separation of the peasant from the land, and to prevent the creation of a proletarian class of rural day-laborers. It provided that only one family should live in one house, and that each cottage should have not less than four acres attached to it. After the time of Elizabeth the movement for enclosure, although it did not wholly cease, noticeably declined, and despite the steadiness of pressure upon it the mediæval village persisted in all its essentials into the 18th century. At this time other circumstances combined with the move-

* The office of Justice of the Peace was created in the first year of Edward III. Originally appointed to keep the peace in their respective counties, the Justices developed an administrative power which grew steadily until by the middle of the 18th century the Justice of the Peace had become the center of the social order. Most of the powers of the mediæval courts had been given over to him, only one remaining, variously named; as parochial government declined, the village vestries came more and more under his management; each Justice could please himself as to what evidence he would hear or reject in any case. He exercised criminal jurisdiction, controlled the administration of poor relief and settlement laws, and attended to innumerable miscellaneous affairs. See Jenks, *op. cit.*, p. 169 ff., for discussion of Squire as feudal and as official power.

ment for enclosure to make its effects radical and decisive. "The central fact in the history of any village since the Middle Ages is expressed in the word 'enclosure'," says Slater.

Even a brief presentation of the English enclosure movement will betray a color given it by its particular point of view. Historical and economic students vary in their attitude toward the subject, from the purely impersonal and scientific to the partisan or the disinterestedly human. The Hammonds, for example, accept the economic end secured by enclosures as valuable, and propose as their main question, how was this end accomplished? A change so tremendous, involving so large a class of people and the transference of so vast a mass of property, demanded the utmost intelligence and care if it were to be accomplished with the greatest economy for all. Was it so accomplished? For them the question is one not of abstract policy, but of the fortunes of men and women who are of significance in themselves as well as from the standpoint of their contribution to national character and prosperity. This attitude is closer to literature, which always concerns itself with the concrete and the human. It is obviously the attitude congenial to this study, which seeks to bring the facts of village history into such a connection with literature as may serve a fuller and clearer knowledge of the society out of which both grew.

From the national point of view the result of enclosure has always been accounted pure gain. Materially there can be little doubt that this is true; farming became, instead of a means of subsistence to particular families, a source of wealth to the nation; methods of agriculture were improved; net receipts in both rents and production were increased; a system whose chief virtue, agriculturally, had been its stability, gave way to one flexible enough to meet the changing conditions and needs of the day. From this point of view the balance to the nation is clearly on the credit side. Morally the account is not so satisfactory. A class of independent, self-supporting laborers pauperized, driven out of their homes, and made either spiritless or defiant; the harmony of a graded so-

ciety with no gaps between classes replaced by an antagonism between a capitalistic employing class and a proletariat; confidence, good-will, and fellowship diminished or destroyed, suspicion, jealousy, and resentment kindled; a serious national problem bequeathed to succeeding generations,—morally the change meant total loss. Villagers themselves, indeed, did not consider the matter in terms of national gain or loss; they universally feared enclosure as a direct menace to themselves, and most of their fears were justified by the results. How this came about appears clearly enough in an account of the process by which enclosure was secured.

In the 18th century the usual method was by private act, i. e., a separate act of Parliament authorizing enclosure in a single parish. This was the procedure: a land-owner petitioned Parliament for permission to introduce a Bill for an enclosure; this granted, the Bill was read for the first and second times and referred to a committee; when the report of the Committee had been heard, Parliament passed the Bill; it was then sent to the Lords, received royal assent, and finally was carried out in the district concerned, by Commissioners named in the Bill, who redistributed all the land of the parish in accordance with claims presented by land-owners and holders of common rights. Not until 1774 was it necessary for a land-owner to inform other land-owners of his intention to introduce such a Bill; after 1774 notice of such intention had to be affixed to the door of the church for three successive Sundays in August or September. Often such notices were torn down by the small owners and cottagers of the parish, whose distressed objection to the proposed change could find no more useful vent than such violence. What could they do? Unless they lived near London they could not afford the journey to present a counter-petition; moreover such petitions could not secure a hearing unless made by people of importance, land or tithe owners. The whole thing was in fact settled—the Bill framed, the Committee and Commissioners chosen, and parliamentary sanction practically sure—before the first petition was presented. Opposition at home was

likely only to work harm to the objectors, while it was never heard of in Parliament.

In the vast majority of cases Parliament gave permission for the Bill without question; appointed a Committee of which the proposer of the Bill was chairman and the other members named by him; and approved Commissioners who had commonly been appointed one by the lord, one by the tithe-owner, and one by the majority—in value, not in numbers—of the owners. Consent of a majority of the parties concerned was nominally necessary to “satisfy the Committee.” But this consent was in terms not of persons but of property, and one large owner could silence many small owners whose entire livelihood was at stake. Cottagers and squatters, to whom common rights were of supreme importance, were not even consulted. In the House of Commons bills of enclosure were regarded as matters of purely local interest, and when such a Bill was pending attendance was secured only by diligent canvassing on the part of members interested.* In the House of Lords debate centered about the relative claims of land and tithe owners and the question of the commutation of tithes. Would the parson lose anything of his spiritual prestige and power by becoming a farmer between Sundays? The question was debated seriously by the Lords, while the parsons counted up profit and loss and the Church speculated on possible decrease of power to the bishops.†

Commissioners were given practically unrestricted powers so far as small owners were concerned; only the rights of the lord and tithe owner were thoughtfully hedged about by parliamentary care. After the passage

* See, for example, Hammond's account (pp. 66 ff.) of a Bill engineered by George Selwyn, which was to have cleared off the debts of his improvident friend “Bully,” or Bolingbroke, brother of Sir John. The Bill failed, chiefly because Selwyn's friends did not take the trouble to come and vote for it.

† The author of *Snaith Marsh* evidently felt convinced that the parson's balance was on the credit side of his account. Cowper's friend Unwin (see Cowper's *Tithing Time in Essex*) would have welcomed commutation as a relief from the distress of the annual ceremony of payment.

of the Bill all claims under it were to be presented within certain time limits. Here again the poor stood to lose. Not knowing how to read or write, how could they, unaided, possibly meet the technical requirements in presenting their claims? The "hoary-tressed hind" whose picturesqueness, as he gathered boughs from the lord's forest for his cottage fire, Thomas Warton enjoyed along with the other elements of the landscape,*—what did he know of the origin of his right? He only knew that he was getting wood where his father and his grandfather had got it before him. How could he present in proper legal form a claim of which he knew nothing more than this? He could not afford counsel, and even if he could the ignorance and rascality of country practitioners of law, as we know them in the novels of Fielding, for example, would have landed him in worse difficulties. Fancy Tom Jones's friend Partridge coming to his aid!

Even when small claims were properly made and admitted, they were often unfairly met by the assignment of land inferior in location or quality. The possibilities in the case obviously justified fear on the part of small owners and cottagers; and the facts as to the commissioners who executed enclosure do not serve to make that fear seem less in order. Commissioners were frequently semi-professionals, devoting most of their time to this work; they naturally wished to give satisfaction in order to receive further appointments,—and appointments were made by the rich, not by the poor. When unpaid, as often, they found rich "pickings" for themselves in investments. Until 1801 a commissioner was free to buy land in the parish enclosed under his administration as soon as the process was completed; after 1801 he was free to do so after five years.

These facts do not mean that all commissioners were dishonest, all public men completely selfish, and every local lord or large land-owner unjust and hard-hearted. They do mean that the chances were overwhelmingly against the humbler people concerned in the great trans-

* *Ode, Sent to a Friend, on his Leaving a Favourite Village in Hampshire.*
Written 1750, published 1777.

formation going on in rural life. How great this transformation was is shown by various estimates. During the age of Queen Anne parliament passed two private enclosure bills; during that of George I, sixteen; of George II, two hundred and twenty-six; of George III, three thousand five hundred and fifty-four.* Or in terms of another estimate, between 1702 and 1760 there were 246 acts affecting about 400,000 acres; between 1760 and 1810 there were nearly 2200, affecting more than 4,500,000 acres. It is probable that nearly twenty per cent of the total acreage of England was enclosed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.†

In 1845 Lord Lincoln,‡ introducing the General Enclosure Bill of that year, declared that "in nineteen cases out of twenty, Committees of this House, sitting on private Bills, neglected the rights of the poor." Arthur Young, at first an ardent advocate of enclosure, stumbled upon evidence that he was in error and utterly revised his opinion. In 1801 he wrote: "By nineteen out of twenty Enclosure Bills the poor are injured, and some grossly injured. . . . Mr. Forster of Norwich, after giving me an account of twenty inclosures in which he had acted as Commissioner, stated his opinion on their general effect on the poor, and lamented that he had been accessory to the injuring of 2000 poor people, at the rate of twenty families per parish. . . . The poor in these parishes may say, and with truth, 'Parliament may be tender of property: all I know is that I had a cow and an Act of Parliament has taken it from me.'"§ Slater's careful investigations led him to the estimate that of the Enclosure Acts passed before 1845 not more than one per cent made special provision for the poor.||

* Hasbach, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-58.

† Hammond, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42, gives various estimates.

‡ House of Commons, May 1, 1845.

§ Arthur Young, *Inquiry into the propriety of applying wastes to the better support and maintenance of the poor*, p. 42.

|| Slater, *op. cit.*, p. 128. The General Report on Enclosures, 1808, contains such striking descriptions of the results of enclosure as these: "Todenham, Gloucester. Nothing increased but the poor. Eight farm-houses filled with them.

The engrossing of farms, characteristic of the age, though it proceeded often independently of enclosure, yet furthered and was furthered by the enclosure movement. Both were parts of the same national trend of circumstances. Improved tools and methods in agriculture, together with the larger demand for commodities made by growing industrial centers, and increased facilities for the transportation of produce, made farming on a large scale both possible and profitable. Large farming demanded capital, and prospering trade conditions made this abundant and available throughout the country. Consequently the land-hunger of farmers grew insatiable. They seized upon small farms until there were almost none left in the land. No small bit of ground anywhere was too small for their coveting; the two or three rented acres of a cottager, even his garden (especially desirable land because of its high state of cultivation), fell into the extensive acreage of the large farmer. Obviously, when the slower process of extending his land could be replaced by the more drastic and immediate one of an enclosure, the farmer with capital did not allow any soft sentimentality to stand in the way of his driving villagers from their ancient fields and commons.

In the reorganization of the village after enclosure, just what happened to the small men of the community? The annals of the poor are short and simple here as everywhere. Those who could not present properly authenticated claims, received nothing; they sold the few beasts for which they no longer had pasturage, and fell into the position of day-laborers, with nothing to supplement their daily wages. Men with recognized claims received

"Tingewick, Bucks. Milk to be had at 1d. a quart before; now not to be had at any rate.

"Tulny, Bedfordshire. Cows lessened from 110 to 40.

"Letcome, Berkshire. The poor can no longer keep a cow, and they are therefore now maintained by the parish."

A Maulden cottager declared to an investigator for this Report that enclosing was worse for England than ten wars. "Why, my friend," asked the investigator, "what have you lost by it?" "I kept four cows before the parish was enclosed, and now I don't keep so much as a goose; and you ask me what I lose by it!"

what the Commissioners decided upon as the equivalent of these claims, in the shape of a small allotment of land.* The expenses of enclosure had to be borne by all owners, and in many cases the value of the land did not equal the expense of fencing it; the owner had no choice but to sell his land and his stock, become a day-laborer, move to the city and enter some industry, or emigrate to America. Even when the allotment of land was in itself worth keeping, it often would not yield enough to pay for the pasturage of stock necessary for its fertilization; it speedily became exhausted, failed to support paying crops, and the owner must sell for what he could get, and take his chances with those who had formerly had much less than he. Indeed, it mattered little whether a man had had property before enclosure or not; the levelling process of enclosure reduced all small holders to the same helplessness.

And the pity of it all was not the loss of land or stock or money, but the loss of independence, and spirit. There was throughout the whole process not one point at which a man of the humble sort could move to help himself; he was the complete and utter sport of powers above him. All things combined to keep him in subjection: new machinery and the rapid development of factories made useless his old cottage industries and cut off one source of income; the demand of growing industrial centers took out of his reach such fundamental necessities as meat, milk, butter, cheese,—things which he had possessed as a matter of course under his former way of living; payment in kind (that is, in articles of food or use) had given way almost completely to payment in money, and prices of the things which he must now buy had risen out of all proportion to wages; settlement laws kept him from finding a new home where he might redeem his fortunes under

* Cottagers in rented houses lost completely, the compensation going to the owner of the cottage only. Squatters fared as the good will of lord and commissioner dictated. Encroachments of more than twenty years were ordinarily recognized; in such cases the squatter shared the fate of other cottagers, but in the case of briefer holdings the squatter became at once wholly bankrupt, losing at one blow the fruits of years of toil and thrift.

conditions to which he was accustomed and fitted; poor-laws made him the property of the parish, and poor-relief was administered in a way to destroy the last vestige of his hopefulness or his self respect. Nowhere did there seem any way out. "No class in the world," says Hammond, "has so beaten and crouching a history."

The Poor Law was an inheritance from the age of Elizabeth, as already noted, but the 18th century gave it some new features which demand attention. The Poor Laws after 1722 provided a system of employment as well as of relief. An act of this year made easy the establishment of work-houses,—“houses of kind restraint,” the poet Dyer calls them,* in a phrase of greater appeal to the benevolent among the comfortable classes than to the aged and infirm poor who found enforced shelter and employment within their hated walls. Poor-houses, supplying only shelter, and work-houses, supplying also employment, were together the outer symbol of that extreme poverty which, treated as crime more than misfortune by the state, was misery and disgrace to a people who loved independence and clung to it with a stubborn pride.† But when, late in the century, the allowance system became general, even this pride itself gave way, and the worst possible injury to the peasant was wrought in the breaking of his spirit, and the degradation of his standard of living, both economic and moral.

The new methods of agriculture demanded a supply of labor that should be cheap and constant, that could be used or turned off at will. Too great independence on the

* *The Fleece*, Book III, 1757.

† Evidences of this pride are innumerable both in literature and in history. It is not merely the loneliness of the coldly impersonal life in an institution which poor people dreaded, but the disgrace of dependence. Miss Davies' old village woman (Davies, Maude F., *op. cit.*, pp. 190-191) who, though too feeble to work and without family to help in her support, steadfastly refused to appeal to the parish and lived along always in bad health and more than half starved, is representative of thousands. Often the struggle to maintain independence absorbed a poor man's whole moral force and made him narrow, hard, bitter, and unlovely. The loss of native pride is hardly more deplorable than its perversion by circumstances (which should be controllable by society) into a force for harm.

part of the laborer did not suit the need and convenience of the farmer. Formerly occasional unemployment had not destroyed the cottager's independence; intervals between jobs he could spend profitably in cutting a supply of furze or turf for fuel, or in working in his own garden or holding, and he had his cow and some small stock to yield food and income; he had felt very little dependence on ready money. Now, forced to rely solely on money wages, every interruption to his employment meant distress and hastened him on his way to complete pauperization. When he had reached this happy consummation the state provided for his need thus: he was maintained in the Work-house; or he was sent "on the rounds,"—that is, sent from house to house through the parish for employment, which house-holders were bound to give him, and which was paid for partly by the house-holders and partly out of the rates;* or he was put on the allowance system,—that is, he was assured of employment, and of pay in accordance with a scale based on food prices and the size of his dependent family.† Under the allowance system the farmer might pay him as he could in the open market of labor; the difference between this wage and the allowance provided by the scale was paid him out of the poor rate.

Against such an iniquitous scheme what pride could stand up? It supplied no incentive to ambition or effort, only a demoralizing dependence. Since allowance was proportioned to size of family, a premium was put upon large families, and since illegitimate children were provided for on the same scale as others, illegitimacy flourished. The greater the number of her illegitimate chil-

* See Crabbe, *The Village*, Book I:

"Alternate masters now their slave command,
Urge the weak efforts of his feeble hand,
And, when his age attempts his task in vain,
With ruthless taunts, of lazy poor complain."

† Many variations and complications of these two systems of out-door relief existed; but this bare statement is not untrue to the essence of the poor law. It is to be noted that the allowance system was in operation only irregularly before 1795, and its pernicious effect not general before the early years of the 19th century.

dren, the more comfortable a woman's income and the greater her chances of marriage, since she could bring her husband the dowry of a generous parish allowance. The pauper population grew apace. It was increased rapidly also by additions from the ranks of the independent, who could not long compete with pauper labor; without assistance from the rates a man could not live on the wages available to him, and he must use up his small funds or sell his cottage as speedily as possible, in order to avail himself of the help of the rates.*

Again it must be called to mind that this picture, as that of the mediæval village, is a generalized one, more true for the south of England than for the north, for communities near large industrial centers than those remote.† The whole matter is one of the greatest complexity, and general statements are subject to exception and modification. But as to the fact of wide-spread hardship and injury suffered by the agricultural classes during the period 1760–1830 (approximately), there can be no manner of doubt. During this time they became the proletarian class in a competitive society, they lost their sense of social position and respect, they settled into a dull routine of monotonous work instead of continuing in the diversity of employment that had quickened their interest and developed their skill in the earlier day. Consider the miller of John Cunningham's poem,‡—friendly, hearty, comradely, or the miller of Burns,—

"Oh the miller was strappin', the miller was ruddy,
With a heart like a lord, and a hue like a lady;"

remember Cunningham's gay little picture of the farmer

* See *post*, p. 190, Harriet Martineau, *The Parish*, 1833.

† For example, Suffolk, Crabbe's county, was described by Cobbett in 1830 (and Cobbett never gave praise where it was not due) as in a beautiful condition and exhibiting to the eye the superiority which Suffolk farmers had always boasted of. (Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, ii, 297.) Yet even here conditions were not so easy for laborers. In 1795 Suffolk shared in the food riots which occurred all over England under pressure of high prices and inadequate wages. Again in 1816 and in 1830 Suffolk laborers are found among the rioters.

‡ See *post*, p. 66.

lass stopping to chat with the miller's lad as she brought her little store of grain to the mill to be ground,* and in the place of this good comradeship and heartiness of co-operation put an impersonal, inflexible system. The small owner no longer had any grain to be ground. But the farmer who had, sold it to the miller, who sold his flour to the meal-man, who sold it to the shop-keeper, who sold it to the poor man,—and at a rate resulting from the profits paid at each one of these various steps in the process. The economic loss to the poor man is obvious; the moral loss to the village community was no less real.

The impression must not be left that the sole motive underlying this entire movement was one of small personal greed. This motive undoubtedly determined the course of innumerable individuals, both large land-owners from among the gentry, and farmers of the new type. But beyond this motive there was the larger one of ambition for advancement in agricultural method and achievement. Enterprising farmers were naturally and rightly impatient of a system which enabled dully conservative neighbors to block every move they made toward improvement, and were eager to break up such a system. Many public spirited men, agriculturists, economists, publicists, urged the abolition of the awkward and unprogressive communal system. If all those who advocated enclosure on public grounds had been as honest as Arthur Young in the recognition of injustice to the poor, and as earnest as he in the search for ways of protecting the interests of the lower classes without losing the gain sought to the nation as a whole, all would have been well. But it was the habit of the age to look upon the large and general aspect of things, and the argument from national profit too easily lost sight of the factor of the individual's claim, especially when that claim was an inconvenient one.

In many respects the upheaval among rural laborers, the loosening of their attachment to the soil, suited the aristocratic and ruling classes. The country was at war for most of the century, and engaged in its longest and severest struggle just when the greatest unsettling of

* See *post*, p. 65.

country affairs occurred. It was opportune that so many men should be freed from their former occupations for enlistment in army and navy. The war called for much work in iron and metal industries; many agricultural laborers turned from the land into these occupations. In the interest of commerce canals were being cut and harbors improved; here too additional labor was welcome. Most of all, the growing industries of city and factory called for labor, and large numbers of farm workers flocked to meet the demand, attracted by the hope of making their fortune, or driven by the necessity of supplying immediate need. National wealth was enormously increased by all this diversion of labor, and it is little wonder that people in control, accustomed in the main to think of rural laborers as "hardy oaks," "Strong Labor," "Happy Innocence," when they did not think of them as Colins and Damons and Celias, should have been slow to regard the matter from a human and personal point of view. Pitt's bill for social reform, offered in 1796, meeting with severe criticism, was withdrawn after brief debate and with no attempt at its defense. Pitt's excuse, made four years later in reply to some comment on the affair, is reported in the Parliamentary Register: "Inexperienced himself in country affairs, and in the condition of the poor, he was diffident of his own opinion, and would not press the measure upon the attention of the House." Canning's response to Eden's great book, *The State of the Poor*, 1797, which he read at Pitt's request, was a parody on the grotesque names to be found in its Appendix.* An intimate knowledge of country affairs and a keen interest in the fortune of country people, was not expected of politicians,—not even of statesmen.

There was of course outcry from various sources. The fear of depopulation was rather widespread, though

* Hammond, *op. cit.*, p. 210. It is interesting to recall that 1797-98 was the year of the *Anti-Jacobin*, in which a little group of the political and personal friends of Pitt, headed by Canning, sought to counteract the pernicious influence of French ideas throughout England. Dead in earnest, though employing the light weapons of satire and parody, they spent valuable strength fighting a shadowy enemy, while they failed to recognize a living and present foe.

complaint was less of depopulation of England as a whole (a complaint which might have moved the ruling classes) than of local depopulation, with injury to those forced to move and to change their occupation. The only remarkable thing is that this danger was not more completely understood by those with authority to end it, for its extent and seriousness are beyond question, witnessed to by many observers. In the midlands within forty years, for example, several hundred villages of four or five hundred inhabitants each, sank to a population of eighty each, or even half that number. In one case of enclosure twenty farms were reduced to four, out of eighty-two houses sixty cottages were pulled down, and the permanent laborers became twelve in number, four herdsmen and eight maid-servants; the whole region was given over to grazing.* Two Leicestershire villages of thirty-four or thirty-five dwellings each were reduced by enclosure, the first to three dwellings, the parsonage house and the cottages of two shepherds, and the second to one, the house of the owner of the lordship.† Of these dispossessed people the "Country Farmer" says that many sold their stock-in-trade, raised from £50 to £100, and took passage for America. Others who could not raise such amounts went to manufacturing places, Birmingham, Coventry, and others. What conditions awaited them there it is not comforting to consider. As early as 1732 John Cowper wrote ‡ that within thirty years he had seen above twenty Lordships or Parishes enclosed and in every case with the result of depopulation, villages of one hundred inhabitants sinking to ten, one hundred and twenty families to four, two, or even one. Local depopulation, while more sure and extreme in such regions as the Midlands, where conversion from arable to pasture accompanied enclosure, was not confined to those regions, or to cases of conversion. For reasons already made sufficiently evident, the small

* *Thoughts on Inclosures, by a Country Farmer, 1786.*

† Rev. John Howlett, *Enclosures and Depopulation*, p. 12, cited by Slater, p. 100.

‡ John Cowper, *Inclosing Commons and Common field lands is contrary to the interest of the Nation.*

men even in regions kept under tillage after enclosure were often forced to seek a livelihood in other places.

Their first impulse was naturally to move into an open parish somewhere, and this they often did. But because of Settlement Acts designed originally to prevent vagabondage, and in this period taken advantage of by employing classes to control the movement of labor, it was often impossible to secure tenement in an open parish, which in self-defense took measures to keep out a flood of incomers already pauperized or sure to become parish charges in brief time. Without going into the complications of these acts and the various changes to which they were subjected at this time, we may take note of a few significant facts. When parish relief was given by the parish within which a man had established his settlement by residence for a stipulated time, parishes tried to prevent such settlement by the pulling down of cottages; when it was given in the place of birth, parishes pulled down cottages in order to reduce the number of possible birth-places; when settlement was granted on condition of employment for a year's service, employers hired servants for fifty-one weeks; * when admission to a new parish was secured by certificate from the authorities in the parish left, then a man could gain certificate only to near-by parishes with open fields and commons, and not to distant places from which he might have to be brought back at the expense of the first parish; in manufacturing towns, where a large supply of labor was desired to the end of keeping wages down, the masters, who were often also overseers, invited people in, encouraged them to establish residence, and then refused them certificates of removal. No great debate over the harmfulness of such laws is necessary. The finality with which they cut off from the ruined agricultural laborer all hope of redeeming his fortunes, and often fixed him in the slavery of a wretched city existence, is all too evident.

Even apart from enclosure, poor law, and settlement

* The annual hiring fairs which were the subject of so much controversy and which appear here and there in the literature of this and later times, were connected with this provision of the settlement laws.

acts, there was war on cottages in the 18th century. With the engrossment of farms, cottages came to be an annoyance to the large farmer, who did not need the labor they housed, and to his rent receiver, who hated dealing with so many trifling accounts. Hence they were often pulled down on economic grounds. And on aesthetic grounds they came to be thought objectionable, interfering with a lord's prospect, obtruding their humbleness upon his pride, their homeliness upon the splendid beauty of his estate. The famous case of the Napier eviction in Ireland is perhaps most widely known, because of its traditional association with Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*. Trollope's *Small House at Allington* shows how fixed the fashion for an open view had become by his day. "I fancy that our ideas of rural grandeur have altered," he says, "since many of our older country seats were built. To be near the village, so as in some way to afford comfort, protection, and patronage, and perhaps also with some view to the pleasantness of neighborhood to its own inmates, seemed to be the object of a gentleman when building his house in the old days. A solitude in the center of a wide park is now the only site that can be recognized as eligible. No cottage must be seen, unless the cottage *orné* of the gardener. The village, if it cannot be abolished, must get out of sight. The sound of the church bells is not desirable, and the road on which the profane vulgar travel by their own right must be at a distance. When some old Dale of Allington built his house, he thought differently. There stood the church and there the village, and, pleased with such vicinity, he sat himself down close to his God and to his tenants." *

This destruction of cottages can mean only one thing, the disappearance of the pleasant relation between a lord and his tenants and of the old familiar association between a farmer and his laborers. A farmer of the old school would have been incapable of such action toward the men whom he knew as his own fellow workmen, his familiars in daily life, like himself in thought, speech, and action. But the new masters were of another breed; infected by

* Chapter I. 1864.

the love of luxury and show, aping the gentry in every possible way, many of them townsmen come into the country solely for business success and social advancement and with no conception of the traditions, prejudices, and convictions that lay back of the peasant's habit of life, with no desire for and no possible means to an adequate understanding of the problems of his existence, the new race of farmers, both gentry and middle class, forwarded the material prosperity of England but added immeasurably to her moral debt to her own peasantry, a debt still pressing heavily for payment.

If anything further were needed to demonstrate the separation in sympathy and understanding of rich from poor in England, and the notably undemocratic trend in the rise of a great middle class, the operation of English game laws would supply it. All the literature of the period is full of it. The dramatic and powerful presentation of the facts of the case, in all their significance for individual men and women, in the dozen or so pages of the remarkable book of Mr. and Mrs. Hammond, gives new significance and poignancy to the literary treatment. The whole matter finds its place readily in the scheme of things which we have just been following through. The increased luxury which characterized the life of upper classes appeared typically in the sport of hunting,* and just at the time when rural laborers were at the nadir of their fortunes game laws became unbearably obnoxious. Given an able-bodied, energetic young workman of twenty-two or thereabouts, working at breaking stones by the roadside, paid by the parish a wage of three shillings or three shillings sixpence a week; given also a forest bordering upon this same road, from which he could in one night take enough game to yield the amount of several days' wages,—how could poaching seem anything but a legitimate and almost providential way of escape? A young man thus at work cracking stones by a Surrey roadside was asked how he could live on half a crown a week; he replied, "I don't live upon it." "How

* Satirized delightfully in the person of young Constant, *The Lord of the Manor*, *post*, p. 130.

do you live then?" "Why, I *poach*: it is better to be hanged than to starve to death."

From 1770 on the severity of game laws increased, even as the temptation to their violation redoubled. More and more cruel measures for their enforcement were sanctioned, in spite of indignant protest and opposition from a few enlightened and humane spirits. Poachers took to working in gangs for purposes of defense. As poverty increased, added cruelty of punishment was all that a ruling class could devise as a check to increasing offenses. And all the time poaching was to the minds of the poor no violation of any moral law; no poor man ever believed in his heart that the gentry had any real right to the wild game of the forests,—no poor man ever condemned another for poaching. For that matter the offense was condoned very generally. City people bought from the market game that could have come there only from a poacher's hand.* Yet long imprisonments, transportations, executions were inflicted alike upon hardened professional poachers, upon young men driven to poaching for the support of starving families, and upon boys poaching largely in a spirit of adventure. Under all this how could the old fiction of the country as the home of innocent happiness and simple plenty hold out? How could the old pastoral nonsense continue?

The game laws were cruel, but not more cruel than other less conspicuous acts by which the ruling classes tried to protect themselves against the offenses of an impoverished and desperate peasantry. The stringency of 18th century penal laws is too well known to need much comment. That the increasing enlightenment of the time should have brought about no increase of lenity and wisdom in the dealing with crime is at first sight strange enough. But the attention of most of the public was elsewhere; political events were pressing, large questions of commerce and of empire were in hand, political doctrines and theories of abstract rights claimed attention.

* The barber-doctor in O'Keeffe's *Love in a Village* bought a wallet of game from a poacher under the very shade of the Justice's house as a present for the Justice's wife.

Troubles with the rural population seemed only a nagging annoyance, not a matter demanding the adoption of a wide and far-seeing national policy. Witness, for example, the short-sighted as well as to the modern view morally unjustifiable policy of impressment, which added immeasurably to the bitterness of the country population in regions by the sea.*

With the unprecedented rise in prices which came in the '90's, social conditions grew so desperate that they could not be ignored even by a preoccupied Parliament. Nor was Parliament without explicit information or urgent appeal. Agricultural writers, both advocates and opponents of enclosure, set forth the evils of the methods by which enclosure was being secured, and urged various means of reform; social writers presented the case for the laborers with even greater convincingness. In 1795 was formed the Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor, which in default of parliamentary action accomplished local and partial relief, though some of their measures were ill-advised and unsuccessful. Diet reform was a popular measure,—popular, that is, among those who were only to advocate, not to practice, it. Why should the poor hold to their pernicious and extravagant habit of drinking bad tea, instead of milk? The answer was as simple as that to a more famous question of Marie Antoinette's. With no milk to be had, even wretched, thrice-steeped tea afforded a stimulation that made it preferable to water, its only alternative. Well-to-do people, accustomed to variety in their food, could not understand the stubborn resistance of peasants to proposed changes in their diet, a resistance due to an instinctive distrust of the new and sense of dependence upon the old. South of England laborers were sincerely convinced that they could not do their work on barley bread instead of white.

A minimum wage law, reform of poor law and of settlement acts, were proposed, discussed, and in the main, dismissed. The most promising single measure, that of

* Consider the temper of such a community as that of Mrs. Gaskell's *Sylvia's Lovers*, a novel of 1863 picturing events of the late 18th century.

allotments, went the same way. Farmers, shop-keepers, landlords, all feared the independence which allotments might secure to villagers. In vain did writer after writer sound the slogan of "two acres and a cow," urge the securing to agricultural laborers of small gardens, or call to witness the success of allotments made by individual landlords. No general policy of allotment was adopted. Parliament talked on without action, and meanwhile the powers of local government did one positive and incalculably mischievous thing. They fixed upon the country the most pernicious form of poor relief it had known, the allowance system already in force in some districts of England.* A meeting of the Justices of Berkshire and some other "discreet persons" convened at Speenhamland, on May 6, 1795, to effect a rating of wages for the relief of existing conditions. Instead, they "recommended" strongly to farmers the raising of wages to meet existing prices, and adopted the allowance system, drawing up a scale so convenient that it was very quickly adopted in other parishes and served to extend and fix the pernicious system, which thereafter went by the name Speenhamland.

So for another quarter of a century, and more, things went on. Social reform was not to be secured until political reform had first been realized. High prices continued, with fluctuations that brought uncertainty and not relief; enclosure proceeded, with only slight diminishing of the expense involved and no security to the poor.† The last violent protest of peasants came with the agricultural uprising of 1830, the dramatic and pitiful story of which must not be told here.‡ With the repeal of the

* Described briefly, *ante*, p. 31.

† An act of 1801 standardized the methods and reduced the expense of enclosure, but did little to protect the interests of the poor. A General Enclosure Act in 1836 provided for enclosure without special parliamentary sanction when two thirds in number and value of the owners desired it. In 1845 an Act provided for Commissioners, with an express view to preventing local injustice. This last Act meant real advantage to the poor, though even after its passage their interests occasionally suffered.

‡ W. H. Hudson, in the chapter "Old Wiltshire Days" of his book *A Shepherd's Life*, 1910, has this comment: "It is a pity that the history of

Corn Laws,—laws furnishing another instance of class legislation, designed to add to the wealth of the nation by the direct protection of one class of its people (though, to be sure, the agricultural and commercial classes disagreed violently as to which class received this protection), came relief to the peasant in the reduction of prices; and with the reform of Parliament better counsel prevailing in other matters relaxed the general tension. The worst of the countryman's ills were over. But for a multitude it was too late, and upon the rest the experience of half a century had left its marks.

How far this bitter chapter in the history of England's country people enters into the literature of the time, is the question for the literary student. It is inconceivable that experiences of such deep emotional appeal should go quite unrecorded in the imaginative literature of an age, however aristocratic in temper and government. Moreover, despite the urban nature of the 18th century literary world, it yet had its eye pretty steadily on the country throughout the whole century; despite its rationalistic disregard of uncultivated man, it showed an increasing interest in the humble of both city and country; despite its love of the traditional and conventional and Arcadian in literary form and method, it betrayed tendencies toward the new and the realistic. It is a matter of no slight interest to discover what such a literary world did with the villager at its gates.

this rising of the agricultural labourer, the most patient and submissive of men, has never been written. Nothing, in fact, has ever been said of it except from the point of view of landowners and farmers, but there is ample material for a truer and a moving narrative, not only in the brief reports in the papers of the time, but also in the memories of many persons still living, and of their children and children's children, preserved in many a cottage throughout the south of England." The narrative was given in 1911, in Hammonds' *Village Labourer, 1760-1830*.

CHAPTER III

THE CHANGING VILLAGE AND THE NATIONAL LIFE

Up to the last two centuries there is not much in English literature to direct attention to the complex and intricate organization of the mediæval village. Chaucer, the author of *Piers Plowman*, Sir Thomas More, here and there a renaissance playwright, in a few brief poems Robert Herrick,—hardly a dozen writers before the 18th century deal with the every day affairs of rural England. It is only when, with the growing democratization of letters, the "lower part of mankind" win a recognized right to literary treatment along with princes and nobles, that we are led to an examination of that system which produced the sturdy, shrewd, self-reliant, independent, contented peasantry in which England so long implicitly believed as underlying her national prosperity. At the opening of the 18th century English literature possessed rustics in plenty, both English and Arcadian, but it had no such studies of a rural society as *The Deserted Village* of Goldsmith, or *The Village* of Crabbe. The appearance of the village theme in English letters is a part of a complex intellectual and social movement, in some degree independent of the immediate events of English life. Yet it can hardly be accidental that the age in which this theme assumed a distinct and permanent place in literature was also the age of transformation within the village itself. At the beginning of the century the village was still essentially what it had been throughout the middle ages, a coöperative community; at the close of the century it had very generally assumed the competitive character of the village society of today.

In investigating the relation of this great event in village history to the new literature of the village, the first step is to make a somewhat general survey of the social, intellectual, and political world in which both

developments occurred. What was the attitude of the larger public toward the villager and his affairs? What was the place of the rural village in national life? What were the elements in the culture of the age which determined or directed the fortunes of English peasantry? The year 1770 saw the new socialized treatment of English rustics typically represented by the *Deserted Village* (it appeared first in 1769), and the movement of change within the village well on toward high tide. Roughly, then, the period before 1770 falls especially under investigation in our first survey. We need perhaps to remind ourselves once more that since the village of pre-industrial England was typically an agricultural community, the study of the village is practically identical with a study of the country, its people and its affairs.

We have already seen that the change in the village which was carried so swiftly to its consummation in the 18th century, was the result of a diversity of causes which had been at work for centuries, steadily, but so slowly as often to be imperceptible even to those most nearly affected by them. At the opening of the 18th century the villagers of England would no more have questioned the permanence of their traditional order of life than they would have questioned the established order of nature. The one was accepted as no less fundamental and inevitable than the other. Living on, simply and unapprehensively, in a world whose forces were soon to work them incalculable harm, they meanwhile supplied that world with a picture of self-sufficiency, of sturdy acceptance of the toils and hardships of life along with its satisfactions, and of a degree of comeliness and grace in the outer aspects of their living, not easily to be disturbed by a recognition of those harsher facts which always lie beneath the surface of a country life, however idyllic its outer charm.

If at the beginning of the century the changes going on were but dimly appreciated by villagers, by the rest of the world they were for decades hardly so much as noticed. English life was centering more and more in cities, and the literary world of the 18th century was completely

an urban one. To that brilliant society of letters which at the opening of the century gathered in the salons and coffee-houses of London, and which grew steadily in brilliancy and power as the decades passed, London was the summation of all things valuable in life. Boswell once suggested to Dr. Johnson a doubt that if he were to reside in London, the exquisite zest with which he relished it in occasional visits might go off, and he might grow tired of it. "Why, Sir," exclaimed the Doctor, "you find no man, at all intellectual, who is willing to leave London. No, Sir, when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life, for there is in London all that life can afford." And again when Boswell ventured to intimate that there were people who were content to live in the country, Johnson's reply was prompt and final: "Sir, it is in the intellectual world as it is in the physical world; we are told by natural philosophers that a body is at rest in the place that is fit for it; they who are content to live in the country are *fit* for the country." A young wit might begin his literary career in Oxford or Cambridge, but London was his goal. There, in close connection with affairs of church and state and society, in contact with the main current of national thought, in the stimulating company of other men of letters, and under the smiles of those ladies of fashion who were a considerable factor in the production of letters as well as an element to be reckoned with in the widening reading public, there he might hope to play a real part in the literature of the day. Outside of London he was an exile.

Swift's list of the "Blessings of a Country Life" is exhausted in a line and a half:

"Far from our debtors; no Dublin letters;
Not seen by our betters."

His "Plagues of a Country Life" are more numerous:

"A companion with news; a great want of shoes;
Eat lean meat, or chuse; a church without pews;
Our horses astray; no straw, oats, or hay;
December in May; our boys run away; all servants at play."

Both blessings and plagues, it will be noticed, are those of the sophisticated man of the world; it is only as offering advantages or disadvantages of residence to the well-to-do and the gentry that the country is considered.

And this is fairly representative of the general attitude. Though Johnson admitted that there were some things that could be done better in the country than in town, yet after all, "a great city is . . . the school for studying life, and 'The proper study of mankind is man,' as Pope observes." How completely this topic for their study was accepted by the writers of the century is evident in the title pages and tables of contents of their books. For the age of the "enlightenment" man was characteristically the embodiment of reason. His life was an ordered thing; his supreme achievements were great systems of thought and institutions of state and religion and society; man was no creature of undirected and uncontrolled nature,—the "natural" and the "spontaneous" in conduct was no ideal of a Lord Chesterfield for his son, nor could nature unmethodized find any place in the art of an Addison or a Pope. Man as the embodiment of reason, then, with his philosophies, his state-craft, his political institutions, his literary traditions, his social conventions, was the proper theme for letters. The scheme offered little place for the peasant. Thomas Warton in publishing his *Five Pastoral Eclogues: The Scenes of which are supposed to lie among the shepherds, oppressed by the war in Germany*,* felt called upon to apologize for intruding such a subject upon the public notice. His Preface says: "How the idea of fields and woods, and a poetry whose very essence is a rural life will agree with the polite taste of the town, and of gentlemen who are more conversant in the fashionable ornaments of life, is a question: but I hope as they relate to that war, which is at present the most general topic of conversation, this unpoliteness will in some measure be excused."

As an individual evidently the peasant was no proper subject for the "study of mankind." With the peasantry as a class the case was different. They were an institu-

* 1745.

tion, like the constitution, parliament, or the church, to be taken for granted in the same way, and reckoned on as fixed in the English fabric. The upper and middle classes in a liberty-loving England, living under an aristocratic class government, regarded their agricultural laborers with an easy and complacent generalization, as of course, being English, the happiest, healthiest, most virtuous peasantry in the world. They appear as "strong Labor," "honest Toil," "jolly Mirth," "fat Good-nature." They enjoy the delights of conviviality, but with a decent moderation. John Philips describes the drinking of the new made cider in the home of the farmer: *

"His honest friends, at thirsty hour of dusk,
Come uninvited; he with bounteous hand
Imparts the smoking vintage, sweet reward
Of his own industry; the well-fraught bowl
Circles incessant, whilst the humble cell
With quavering laugh and rural jest resounds. . . .
Gladsome, they quaff, yet not exceed the bounds
Of healthy temperance, nor encroach on night,
Season of rest, but well bedew'd repair
Each to his home, with unsupplanted feet."

Dr. Armstrong, in a long eclogue on "*The Art of Preserving Health*," 1744, begins Book III, "Exercise," with the provision that he writes for the delicate, not the robust,—

"Not to debilitate with timorous rules
A hardy frame."

He would not

"with warm effeminacy nurse
The thriving oak which on the mountain's brow
Bears all the blasts which sweep the wintry heaven."

And such hardy oaks are country laborers:

"Behold the laborer of the glebe, who toils
In dust, in rain, in cold and sultry skies.
Save but the grain from mildew and the flood,
Nought anxious he what sickly stars ascend.
He knows no laws by Esculapius given;
He studies none. Yet him nor midnight fogs

* *Cider*, 1706.

Infest, nor those envenom'd shafts that fly
 When rabid Sirius flies th' autumnal noon.
 His habits pure, with plain and temperate meals,
 Robust with labor, and by custom steel'd
 To every casualty of varied life;
 Serene he bears the peevish eastern blast,
 And uninfected breathes the mortal south."

Undoubtedly rustic laborers are in the main hardy and well, but for a more discriminating picture of their state put beside this passage the *Harvest Morning* of the Northamptonshire peasant poet, John Clare, three quarters of a century later. The laborer, rising stiff and lame and unrested from yesterday's toil, hobbles off to fetch his horses from the neighboring moor; signs of the sultriness of the day to come are ominously present. Yet the sound of whetting scythes is pleasant to hear, and the laborers, once gathered, vie with each other in friendly rivalry at their work. Now and then the refreshing bottle, "heart's delight," is found hid beneath a shock. When noon arrives, all rest together in the grateful shade. Clare knew, as Armstrong scarce suspected, the essential beauty of such a scene, the beauty of form and color and of a whole-hearted community of labor; but he knew no less its hardship and severity. In the earlier day the old pleasant, comfortable idea is echoed and reëchoed, by direct statement and casual reference, in passages too familiar to need illustration. Not before Crabbe's protest in 1783 was any other view presented. Crabbe's lines, ringing with indignation and with pity, are startling in their contrast to the eulogistic tone of Armstrong and his numerous ilk:

"Or will you deem them amply paid in health,
 Labour's fair child, that languishes with wealth?
 Go then! and see them rising with the sun,
 Through a long course of daily toil to run;
 See them beneath the dog-star's raging heat,
 When the knees tremble and the temples beat;
 Behold them, leaning on their scythes, look o'er
 The labour past, and toils to come explore;
 See them alternate suns and showers engage,
 And hoard up aches and anguish for their age;

Through fens and marshy moors their steps pursue,
When their warm pores imbibe the evening dew;
Then own that labour may as fatal be
To these thy slaves, as thine excess to thee." *

At the opening of the century the habit of leaving the city for the country between seasons was establishing itself,† and the attitude of the city visitors toward the country is variously represented as that of complacent tolerance, patronage, or impatient distaste. Among the ladies, who in the main do not aspire to the intellectual delights which attend retirement from the city, there is slight pretense of enjoyment. Flavia, the Beauty for whom Lord Lyttelton writes a soliloquy, laments her state bitterly. She is disconsolate; she dresses with care and sets forth her beauty, but to no end:

"Where none admire 'tis useless to excell;
Where none are Beaus, 'tis vain to be a Belle."

She cannot break one stubborn country heart:

"The brutes, insensible, our pow'r defy:
To love exceeds a Squire's capacity."

She describes her life, "supinely calm, and dully innocent:"

"Now with Mamma at tedious whist I play,
Now without scandal drink insipid tea; . . .
From books to work, from works to books I rove,
And am (alas!) at leisure to improve. . . .
Let me revisit the dear town again:
Let me be seen!—could I that wish obtain,
All other wishes my own pow'r would gain." ‡

Isaac Hawkins Browne makes his "Cælia" fare better. She finds it possible to live quite agreeably in the country. But it is no dull landscape that engrosses her thought; her cares are to receive and pay visits; "to pass the live-long Sunday off" she resorts to walks, or a ride, or even

* *The Village*, Book I.

† See *post*, p. 77.

‡ Lyttelton, *Soliloquy of a Beauty in the Country*.

church. In short, all her delights are those of the town, and she is "content ev'n here,—at least till routs return."* Dr. Hoadly's *Bird of Passage* represents a tricky Miss Harriet who, to while away the tedium of the summer, has skillfully duped young Belmont, who has in good faith retired from the town to peaceful rural joys.†

"Miss Harriet seeks the shade,
And looks the country maid,
And artfully his taste admires."

The two revel together in a common love of lawns and shades and streams, and Belmont finds Miss Harriet the "perfect rural maid." But hardly is his passion declared when she has flown to warmer air and brighter climes, back to town, whither the *season* calls her. Belmont follows her, and finds her betting high amid a crowd of city revellers. He "takes his boots and mounts his nag," and the idyll is ended.

Yet in spite of its deprivations the country was the fashion. It was the fashion to talk, at least, about retirement from the noise and confusion of the town to the leisure and quiet of the country. Prior glances at the fad in *Nonpareil*:

"Let others from the town retire,
And in the field seek new delight;
My Phillis does such joys inspire,
No other objects please my sight."

Cowper, who scarcely knew any other life than that of the country village, put the situation shrewdly in his *Retirement*, describing a prevailing type of country devotee:

"He likes the country, but in truth must own,
Most likes it when he studies it in town."‡

And indeed there is evident affectation in much of the talk of retirement, and often an offensive tone of patron-

* From *Cælia* to *Chloe*.

† Dr. John Hoadly, *The Bird of Passage*. MDCCXLIX.

‡ Lines 573-574.

age. "E. W.,"* for example, begs Celia to leave the town with him for the country, and paints rural joys for her allurements. But Celia must not be without a social setting in which her graces may shine; therefore they will settle "near some fair village" where she may

"live renown'd,
And with her virtues charm the country round."

"The rich will court thee, and the sick'ning poor,
With hearts reviv'd, will bless thee at thy door;
There suff'ring merit, from distress set free,
Will bring its tears of gratitude to thee."

This social fad of playing at country life appeared in the extreme of its absurdity in the *Love Elegies* of James Hammond (published 1743, written 1732). The seventh Elegy, *On Delia's being in the country, where he supposes she stays to see the harvest*, presents the charms of country life, Delia being there:

"Now Delia breathes in woods the fragrant air,
Dull are the hearts that still in town remain,
Venus herself attends on Delia there,
And Cupid sports amid the sylvan train.

Oh, with what joy, my Delia to behold,
I'd press the spade, or wield the weighty prong,
Guide the slow plough-share through the stubborn mold,
And patient goad the loitering ox along;

The scorching heat I'd carelessly despise,
Nor heed the blisters on my tender hand;
The great Apollo wore the same disguise,
Like me subdued to love's supreme command."

This is obviously the make-believe country of a townsman and a Latinist; the poet is a reader of Tibullus and a frequenter of city streets. From the comfortable distance of the town he invokes Ceres, and constructs a glowing picture of that Age of Gold when primitive man lived in perfect serenity, when "our wiser fathers left their fields unsown," and lived upon the highly superior, because wholly "simple," acorn. He breaks off, and concludes:

* *An Epistle to Celia Persuading her to a Retired Life*. By E. W. *The Lover's Maunal*, 1753.

“But, oh! I fondly crave,
 Lead me to Delia, all her eyes inspire
 I’ll do,—I’ll plough, or dig, as Delia’s slave.”

In Elegy XIII “he imagines himself married to Delia, and that, content with each other, they are retired into the country.” He pictures himself as a farmer, sowing his fields, planting his orchards, spreading his hay, but with an abundance of sweet leisure, secured apparently by making Delia responsible for affairs:

“Hers be the care of all my little train,
 While I with tender indolence am blest,
 The Favourite subject of her gentle reign,
 By love alone distinguished from the rest.”

His fancy runs on in entrancing pictures to the hour of his death, and then is overcome by the thought of Delia’s distress; he begs her to leave the room—other weeping friends will care for him—

“Let them, extended on the decent bier,
 Convey the corse in melancholy state,
 Through all the village spread the tender tear,
 While pitying maids our wondrous loves relate.”

Dr. Johnson said of Hammond’s poetry that it contained scarce a quatrain worth preserving.* But surely this deserves to live for its intrinsic merit of a perfect absurdity, as well as for the fact that in its sentimentalism, and in its mingling of classic, urban, and common rustic in a picture of English rural life, it represents characteristic strains in the civilization of its day.

Fortunately this artificiality belonged in England only to the imaginary world of literature; it stopped far short of a Little Trianon and a society of make-believe shepherds and shepherdesses. Moreover in literature its extreme absurdities were confined to a few mediocre poets; Hammond has perhaps no rival in this regard. But the social fashion fell in aptly with the literary tradi-

* Yet see Thomson’s glowing eulogy of Hammond in *Winter* (a passage inserted in the edition of 1744).

tion of the pastoral to preserve in letters a conventional and false idea of the country, and a blindness to its real life and to the difficulties that were steadily growing into a national menace beneath its surface serenity.

Comparatively few of the poets who wrote of the country knew it, or cared to know it, as it really was. Most were content to accept the Golden Age idea and regard country life as "the Matchless Orinda," for example, had presented it in her poem, *A Country Life*, published 1664.* Here she pictured the primitive state of man, a society set free from strife, from thought of gain, from all passion except Love, from all malice and evil, and found the only modern parallel to it in retirement to the country. Thomson, with all his first-hand and familiar acquaintance with the outer aspects of the country, viewed it with the same preconception. To him the villager was the happiest of men,

"who far from public rage
Drinks the pure pleasure of the rural life. . . .
Rich in content, in Nature's bounty rich. . . .
Here, too, dwells simple Truth; plain Innocence;
Unsullied Beauty; sound, unbroken Youth,
Patient of labour, with a little pleased;
Health ever blooming; unambitious Toil;
Calm Contemplation, and poetic Ease."

Thomson's view of the country was that of the idealizing observer, the man who has chosen country life for the aloofness from active affairs which it affords. Public events

"Move not the man who, from the world escaped,
In still retreats and flowery solitudes
To Nature's voice attends, from month to month,
And day to day, through the revolving year."

He enjoys the passing seasons, domestic happiness, the delights of friends and books;

"This is the life which those who fret in guilt
And guilty cities, never knew; the life
Led by primeval ages, uncorrupt,
When angels dwelt, and God himself, with man!"

* Katharine Philips, 1631-1664.

John Langhorne, in the third quarter of the century, concluded a short poem of the *L'Allegro* type, *The Happy Villager*, thus:

"In his hospitable cell
Love and Truth and Freedom dwell;
And, with aspect mild and free,
The graceful nymph, Simplicity.
Hail, ye liberal graces, hail!
Natives all of Arden's vale.
For, with Peace and Virtue, there
Lives the happy villager." *

And the Rev. Gerald Fitzgerald, in a poem entitled *The Academic Sportsman, or, A Winter's Day*,† is pursued by the same conception. As evening comes on, after a day of hunting, the sportsman stops at a cottage for his supper. The poet gives an engaging picture of the cottage and its occupants,—the little girl who shyly leaves her wheel to stare admiringly at the stranger, and the bustling mother, who sends the child briskly back to her place and drives out from the room

"The plaintive hen, the interloping goose,"

whose presence embarrasses her before a guest. With all this realism Fitzgerald can not withhold his hand from the old scene of milk-maid and rustic swain, as impersonations of artless innocence. So firm a hold had the old tradition upon the minds of London poets.

London dramatists, presenting entertainments half pastoral, half rustic, tended to perpetuate among their city audiences the same unthinking idealism. Against a setting of "fields and meadows about a country village," or with "cottage in right foreground, little hill at left with trees and spring, manor house in view, and field of corn filling up the scene," they developed old accepted

* Yet see Langhorne's *Country Justice* (1774 sq.), which is a plea for humanity in country justices, and recognizes conditions as they actually were.

† Bell's *Classical Arrangement of Fugitive Poetry*, vol. 4, p. 69. Noticed in *Gentleman's Magazine* for July, 1773.

farcical situations and plots with often the slightest regard for fitness of action and setting. Even in the most realistic and ballad-like, with rustic characters and simple plot, they usually introduced choruses of shepherds with crooks, haymakers with rakes, or villagers with pipe and tabor, to swing the whole to a finish with conventional lyrics exalting rural life. Such performances demonstrate little more than the superficial interest in the country which a popular fashion enabled dramatic writers to turn to account in various modifications of light opera, the prevailing dramatic form.

To those elements in the culture of 18th century England which tended to perpetuate a conventional and indiscriminating attitude toward the village and its place in national life, must be added the generalizing habit of mind so characteristic of the age. It was the habit of the time to deal with things system-wise; philosophers were attempting to work out for the moral universe a system of thought as self-supporting and universal as mathematicians could demonstrate in the province of mathematics; physical scientists were attempting to bring together all discovered and ascertained fact into universal systems of truth; as the science of political economy grew into recognition it concerned itself with classes and large general laws. The day had not come for the minute examination of detail, for the patient accumulation of masses of small facts, which has given literature under the domination of science so decided a bent toward the individual and realistic. In the treatment of country affairs this generalizing habit strengthened the disposition to consider peasantry rather than peasant.

In literature the habit is conspicuous. It appears, for example, in a revival of the bucolic. Thomson, the poet of nature and of rural life *par excellence* for his age, chose this form as the medium of his poetic expression. Many *genre* pictures of a surprising exactness and detail occur in the *Seasons*, but the poem as a whole is didactic and broadly pictorial; it is the large, generalized, and moralized aspects of nature and affairs with which Thomson is concerned, and each detailed picture is incidental. His

tragic story of the cottager, or yeoman farmer, caught by an overwhelming storm within the limits of his own fields and dying in the snow, while his anxious wife at home is preparing his supper and in vain awaiting his return, is the text for reflections on the miseries to which mankind is subject. His gay scene of indoor cottage pleasures, when the village rouses up the fire and rustic mirth goes round, is followed by a corresponding scene of city gaiety, and both are moralized.*

Another evidence of the same habit of generalization appears in those poems in which so much of the observation of the country found expression at this time, and which, after the manner of Thomson and his earlier models, presented their generalized pictures of nature and society under various divisions of time. It might be by seasons, or by months as in Spenser's tradition, or by days of the week, as in Gay's *Shepherd's Week*, or in still smaller units, as in sundry Morning, Noon, and Night pieces. Of these latter Cotton's *Morning Quatrains* (c. 1685) is an early example of a fashion persisting for many decades. It affords a vision of diverse things going on during the morning hours in inanimate nature, in rustic life, in town; the plough-man, the house-wife, the traveller, the wood-man, the angler, the school-boy, the smith, all are pictured,—“the world is now a busy swarm.” Type names render description unnecessary: Dick, Kate, Vulcan, Silvio, Amarillis, and Colin mark occupation and social position, and no individualization is wished.

A poem such as this, attempting to transcend space and to bring into one comprehensive vision the manifold activities of a whole society, has its own imaginative value. Yet Teufelsdröckh, looking down from his tower

* Akenside's *Winter Solstice*, 1740, contains amid general reflections appropriate to the season an uncommonly vivid and feeling little *genre* picture:

“Meantime perhaps with tender fears
Some village dame the curfew hears,
While round the hearth her children play:
At noon their father went abroad;
The moon is sunk and deep the road;
She sighs, and wonders at his stay.”

a century later upon the teeming city below, penetrating through darkness and dividing walls to the intimate joys and follies and tragedies of men, saw with a world-wide difference. The earlier poet saw broadly but superficially; the outer aspect of life satisfied him. So far as this was characteristic of the age, so far as an unmistakable bent toward generalization existed at the expense of depth, the village could hope to receive, either in literature or in life, nothing more than a surface appreciation.

Such appreciation and recognition, however, it was receiving more and more widely through the advancing decades of the 18th century. An urban literary world, superficial in its knowledge and complacent and patronizing in its attitude, was at least not indifferent to the rural village. Various influences, both literary and social, directed attention thither, and in its own way the age was taking hold of village material and making use of it in both poetry and prose.

Milton had shown in *L'Allegro* the poetic beauty of rural life, in pictures which have since become a regular and familiar part of the literature of the country village. The cock crowing at dawn; the shepherd counting his sheep; the ploughman, milk-maid, and mower at their tasks, and cottagers over their dinner of herbs; the binding of sheaves in the harvest field; the dancing in the chequered shade of the village green; the story telling of cottagers over their evening ale; the superstitions of village folk,—all these in inimitably fresh and graceful and finished verse set a fashion that did not cease to be followed for a century and a half.

Robert Herrick, too, had felt delicately the peculiar charm of those ancient festival customs of May-day and Harvest which attest centuries of slow growing tradition in their celebration, and of those age-old superstitions which cling about every remote locality and color the lives and thoughts of peasant folk, making them in a subtle way to seem a very part of that nature whose invisible forces they feel mysteriously at work in their lives. To the poetic beauty of these elements of rural life Herrick gave ideal expression; they appear in his poems in

sublimated form. Nothing of the rollicking sport of actual May-day village revellers mars the delicate loveliness of the setting for his *Corinna*; the maidens and swains leaping about the white harvest cart, adorning it with oak garlands, and kissing its sheaves of grain, suggest the ceremonials of a primitive nature myth; his superstitions are impersonal and poetic, not reminiscent of an ignorant and credulous and crude people. These poems of Herrick's, though of slighter influence upon succeeding poetry than the more objective verse of Milton, yet had their part in establishing a poetic stock which a later age accepted as a valuable heritage and drew upon with often very slight modification.*

Following such lead as that of Milton and Herrick, then, it is not surprising that the village should first appear in literature as a picturesque and beautiful feature of landscape, in which 18th century poetry was increasingly interested. So Dyer in his *Country Walk*, and in his later and better known *Grongar Hill*:

"Ever charming, ever new,
When will the landscape tire the view! . . .
The pleasant seat, the ruin'd tower,
The naked rock, the shady bower;
The town and village, dome and farm,
Each gives each a double charm,
Like pearls upon an Ethiop's arm."

So Thomson, when his "eye excursive roams." And Thomas Warton, writing in 1750 *To a Friend on his leaving a favourite village in Hampshire*, pictures the village as a beautiful setting for the poetic fancies of his

* How little Herrick was remembered in the period here under discussion appears from an astonishing communication in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for May, 1773. One T. Herne writes the Editor: "The enclosed poems were copied from the leaves of an old book brought from a chandler's shop. If you think them worth preserving, perhaps some of your readers may direct to the author, who seems to have been of the 15th or 16th century, and no contemptible poet." Then follow *Corinna's Going a Maying* and *The Captived Bee*. The Editor makes no comment, and no subsequent number of the Magazine presents either information or conjecture from any correspondent as to the authorship of these "not contemptible" poems.

friend, whose departure has withdrawn all the "shadowy shapes and airy powers" with which he had peopled the village. The poem shows a pleasure in the charms of familiar village scenes, looked at as pictures to fill the eye:

"The veteran beech, that on the plain
Collects at eve the playful train:
The cot that smokes with early fire,
The low-roof'd fane's embosom'd spire! . . .

The well known hoary tressed hind,
That toils with feeble hand to glean
Of wither'd boughs his pittance mean! . . .

Unnoticed now, at twilight's dawn
Returning reapers cross the lawn;
Nor fond attention loves to note
The wether's bell from fold remote."

This use of village scenes as a mere literary property, to be turned to account for decorative purposes whenever the theme admits their introduction, has continued even up to the present time, though in lessening degree as insight into the reality of village life has deepened.

Thomson, indeed, went beyond the merely decorative. There is in his pictures of some of the more distinctly social of country activities a distinct foreshadowing of that later treatment of a rustic society which we associate with Goldsmith. His hay-making scene begins with a line that might be Goldsmith's own:

"Now swarms the jovial village o'er the mead."

And his picture of indoor festivities strongly suggests Goldsmith in its enjoyment of homely, hearty fun and rustic simplicity:

"Meantime the village rouses up the fire;
While well attested, and as well believed,
Heard solemn, goes the goblin story round,
Till superstitious horror creeps o'er all.
Or, frequent in the sounding hall, they wake
The rural gambol. Rustic mirth goes round;
The simple joke that takes the shepherd's heart,
Easily pleased; the long loud laugh, sincere;

The kiss snatch'd hasty from the side-long maid,
 The leap, the slap, the haul; and, shook to notes
 Of native music, the respondent dance;
 Thus jocund fleets with them the winter night."

If Thomson believed the country to be the home of pleasure, content, unsullied beauty, sound youth, ever blooming health, and all other possible virtues, his too roseate view is surely to be attributed to a fortunate acquaintance with an English village of the prosperous, happy kind, rather than to the mere shallow acceptance of a literary tradition or a prevailing social faith, though both the latter may have colored his vision. His pictures bear the unmistakable marks of a first-hand observation.

Moreover Thomson recognizes existing economic conditions in his appeal for tenant farmers to their landlords when autumn floods have swept away all their possessions:

"Ye masters then,
 Be mindful of the rough laborious hand
 That sinks you soft in elegance and ease;
 Be mindful of those limbs in russet clad,
 Whose toil to you is warmth and graceful pride;
 And, oh, be mindful of that sparing board,
 Which covers you with luxury profuse,
 Makes your glass sparkle and your sense rejoice.
 Nor cruelly demand what the deep rains
 And all-involving winds have swept away."

This is beyond the conventional acceptance of simple abundance as always crowning the peasant's board, or of the dependence of England upon her country laborers; it comes from a sympathetic acquaintance with particular country people and an interest in their welfare. It suggests that Thomson had personal knowledge of landlords who pressed cruelly for their rent.

Pastoral poetry, with its characteristic Arcadian ideal, seemed at the opening of the 18th century far enough removed from a village literature. Yet beside the strictly classical and un-English strain in the pastoral ran another, marked by nationalization in substance and setting. Between this latter type of pastoral, and literature dealing with the rustics of an isolated agricultural community,

such as was the village of pre-industrial England, there is evident affiliation.

From 1709, when Ambrose Philips expressed surprise that in an age so addicted to the Muses pastoral poetry was "never so much as thought of," and when he and Pope started a revival of the form by their own contributions to it, and their subsequent discreditable but conspicuous quarrel, there was a steady flood of pastoral writings. Practically every writer tried his hand at pastoral. Much of the output was the merest literary exercise; much of it was "correct" enough, but possessed of no other virtue; most of it is forgotten. Yet as a whole it marks a wide and a long continued attention on the part of a bookish, fashionable, and urban literary world to the country, even though often only the country of letters or of pretense rather than of actuality. It also marks significantly the characteristic 18th century insistence on defined form, as well as the inevitable breaking over such form. All sorts of alien elements in theme and manner appeared in it, and burlesque made disastrous merriment with it. Swift and Johnson, with little love of their own for the country, could have nothing but contempt for a pretense at love of it from other people, and for a false and artificial representation of it in literature. Johnson expressed his condemnation of the falseness of the ordinary pastoral in 1759, in a chapter of *Rasselas*, and Swift, in 1728, gave vent to his contempt in a brutally coarse satire, *Dermott and Sheelah*. Neither was in reality so hard a blow to the pastoral, probably, as that struck quite unintentionally by a lesser man in 1714. The foolish quarrel of Pope and Philips had the fortunate issue of Gay's *Shepherd's Week*, which, starting out as burlesque of Philips, almost forgot its purpose in the interest belonging to the subject matter, so that its grotesqueness of exaggeration dropped off, leaving in the main only a homely or rollicking picture of rustics and their affairs.

Though he imitated ancient pastorals closely, Gay transformed the material of his classic models into something thoroughly English. Probably no two English lovers ever praised their lady-loves in a song contest, but if any

Bill and Tom ever did, it was probably after the manner of Gay's Cuddy and Lobbin Clout, who talked about weather signs, boisterous sports, their taste in food, and all the homely things that enter into an English laborer's experience. The three deserted maidens whose woes fill as many eclogues are real English girls. One of them recalls happy days of work and play with her now faithless lover, tender tokens exchanged, and the dire prophecy made by three sallow gipsies and now come true in her lover's desertion; another abuses her rival roundly and determines upon suicide, but unable to hit upon a method of sufficient dignity, defers it to another day; the third resorts to charms long known in every country-side,—such as appear again in the poems of Burns, for example,—to win back her lover. The element of burlesque and parody is present, but after all the stuff of which the poems are made is genuine. Another, a "dirge," is strangely prophetic of a class of serious poems of a hundred years later which linger sentimentally over the death and funeral rites of a young girl; here Gay is for a time quite serious, but again grows jocular, and concludes with the quatrain:

"Now we trudged homeward to her mother's farm,
To drink new cider mulled, with ginger warm.
For Gaffer Treadwell told us by the bye,
Excessive sorrow is exceeding dry."

The sixth and last eclogue presents through the words of a drunken old ballad singer a mass of such weather knowledge as peasants commonly possess, together with descriptions of fairs and shows and pedlars' stalls, with all their diverse fairings, of mountebanks and pockets picked in crowds; the old fellow sings some of his ballads, *Chevy Chase*, *Joan*, *The Children in the Wood*,—

"Then he was seized with a religious qualm,
And on a sudden sang the hundredth psalm,"

after which he fell asleep again upon a wheat sheaf.

All this is admirable fooling, and often something better; it has the two-fold attractiveness of burlesque and of

lively and truthful though unaspiring verse. Unwittingly Gay was betrayed into a sympathetic treatment of English peasant life as it really was. Even when he did not forget his burlesque, his representation was truthful and full of animation and vigor. It was the first time that English country folk had received such treatment. Gay's work only needed to be freed from its tone of grotesqueness and absurdity and animated by a more quick and genuine human sympathy,—in other words, to be taken with a frank seriousness,—in order to grow into a poetry of nature and of humble life that would by the force of its own appeal replace the artificial pastoral. More effective than any ridicule of the pastoral would have been the substitution for it of something akin to it in its essential characteristics and satisfying the same poetic impulse, but at home in the world which produced it. This substitution Gay was not ready to offer, had indeed never dreamed of the desirability of offering, near as he in fact came to supplying it, and the rest of the world was no more ready to receive. The Arcadian figure of Spenser's Cuddy "keeping his beasts in the budded broomes" was not soon to be replaced by that of Hodge tending his cattle on the village common, or Michael building his sheepfold on a corner of his little farm. A sophisticated public, both readers and writers, preferred the borrowed and the make-believe. Yet such a poem as Gay's *Shepherd's Week* served, as his *Rural Sports* had in slighter degree served a year earlier, to break down rigid conventions and open possibilities for later poets.

Evidences of an interest in country affairs beyond that of the fashionable London set and beyond that of a mere literary convention might be multiplied. The work of Thomson, with its accurate landscape and its *genre* pictures, has already been adduced. Realism such as Gay's was the exception, yet it had its parallels in scattered poems throughout the century. Swift in *Baucis and Philemon* made his old couple wholly English, and suggested a cottage interior like those seen often later, with walls hung with ballads, "Joan of France and English Moll, Fair Rosamund and Robin Hood." Dyer's *Country*

Walk is surprising in the exactness and homeliness of some of its pictures. It belongs unmistakably to the tradition of *L'Allegro*, yet it contains such realistic bits as this description of an old man:

"Here he puffs upon his spade,
And digs up cabbage in the shade:
His tatter'd rags are sable brown,
His beard and hair are sable grown:
The dying sap descends apace,
And leaves a wither'd hand and face."

Christopher Smart's Odes, "*A Morning Piece*" and *A Noon Piece* show the same realistic tendency. For example take this bit from the *Noon Piece*:

"By the rivulet on the rushes,
Beneath a canopy of bushes,
Where the ever-faithful Tray,
Guards the dumplings and the whey,
Collin Clout and Yorkshire Will
From the leathern bottle swill."

John Cunningham illustrates the same tendency much more attractively. In his descriptive poem *Day*, divided into *Morning*, *Noon*, and *Evening*, occur bits of village scenery, some of them charmingly delicate. This, for example, is from *Morning*:

"From the low-roof'd cottage ridge,
See the chattering swallow spring;
Darting through the one-arch'd bridge,
Quick she dips her dappled wing."

And this from *Evening*:

"O'er the heath the heifer strays
Free (the furrow'd task is done):
Now the village windows blaze,
Burnish'd by the setting sun. . . .

"Trudging as the ploughmen go,
(To the smoking hamlet bound),
Giant like their shadows grow
Lengthen'd o'er the level ground."

A Landscape contains in the midst of still-life pictures bits descriptive of village activities, both every day and festal:

“Cheerful as a summer’s morn
(Bouncing from her loaded pad),
Where the maid presents her corn
Smirking to the miller’s lad.

“O’er the green a festal throng
Gambols in fantastic trim.
As the full cart moves along,
Hearken—’tis their harvest hymn.”

Damon and Phebe presents a village May-day scene, and *The Holiday Gown*, a ballad, narrates the love story of a rustic pair in the words of the coquettish, pert, rather malicious young woman concerned. The naïve frankness with which she avows her love for “brisk Roger,” her spiteful hatred of her rival Sue, and her triumph in Sue’s final defeat and humiliation, makes her experience seem a very real one.

This type of “pastoral”—the type that Dr. Johnson could approve as being “in general a representation of rural nature and consequently as exhibiting the ideas and sentiments of those, whoever they are, to whom the country affords pleasure or employment”—is the expression of a not uncommon delight in the picturesque beauty of the country village, supplemented by a genuine and much less frequent interest in the lives and characters of simple people for their own sake. In Cunningham’s *Miller* (1766) this latter interest appears most completely. The miller is a figure of great importance in village society and in Cunningham’s presentation embodies those qualities most valued by England in her peasantry,—independence, self-reliance, cheerfulness, piety, good-fellowship. Cunningham’s miller is without the individualizing marks that distinguish Goldsmith’s school-master and parson from the mass of their kind, but as a type he is drawn with cordial liking and respect. The poem seems much like a forbear of the *Village Blacksmith* of Longfellow:

"In a plain pleasant cottage, conveniently neat,
 With a mill and some meadows—a freehold estate,
 A well-meaning miller by labour supplies
 Those blessings that grandeur to great ones denies:
 No passions to plague him, no cares to torment,
 His constant companions are Health and Content;
 Their lordships in lace may remark, if they will,
 He's honest, though daub'd with the dust of his mill.

"Ere the lark's early carols salute the new day,
 He springs from his cottage as jocund as May;
 He cheerfully whistles, regardless of care,
 Or sings the last ballad he bought at the fair:
 While courtiers are toiled in the cobwebs of state,
 Or bribing elections, in hopes to be great,
 No fraud or ambition his bosom ere fill,
 Contented he works if there's grist for his mill.

"On Sunday bedeck'd in his home-spun array,
 At the church he's the loudest to chant or to pray;
 He sits to a dinner of plain English food,
 Though simple the pudding, his appetite's good.
 At night, when the priest and exciseman are gone,
 He quaffs at the ale-house with Roger and John,
 Then reels to his pillow, and dreams of no ill;
 No monarch more bless'd than the man of the mill."

Cunningham's *Miller* appeared in the same year with the *Vicar of Wakefield*, and in its lesser degree is expressive of the same interest as that which gave us the *Vicar* and *Mrs. Primrose* and *Moses*, and later the school-master and parson of the *Deserted Village*, that is, an interest in well-marked, vigorous, individual character, such as the humbler ranks of society afford in abundance, especially in the country, where isolation tends to preserve individual traits unspoiled. In English prose this interest had already manifested itself in characters not humble in their own circles, but certainly unsophisticated from the point of view of a townsman, characters like *Sir Roger de Coverley* and *Will Wimble*, *Squire Western* and *Parson Adams*. It is the same that later was to give us *Mrs. Poyser* and *Bartle Massey*, *Gabriel Oak*, *Christian Cantle*, and a host of others.

Before Cunningham there is only one English poem comparable to *The Miller* in presenting the full length

portrait of a familiar village personage, namely Shenstone's *Schoolmistress*.^{*} The literary influences in the two poems are radically different. Cunningham shows strongly the influence of ballad literature; his diction is never "poetic," his phrasing is colloquial, his verse light and informal. In the *Schoolmistress* Spenser was the directing power, and simplicity of subject is matched by a consciously archaic diction and a quaintness of phrase; the mood is leisurely and reminiscent and the treatment minutely pictorial. The *Schoolmistress* is drawn in detail; her decent attire, her regard for social differences in the treatment of her pupils, her love of her small titles—"goody," "gossip," "dame," her relentless wielding of the birch-rod, her weakly feminine coaxing of the poor punished imp back to good temper, her thrifty industry with her wheel, her careful Sabbath observance, her indulgence of one spoiled pet among the hens which flocked about the door,—all these details, and more, build up a character of human virtues and foibles almost as real as Sarah Battle, and drawn with the same affectionate enjoyment, if with immeasurably less art. Lamb's dictum calling *The Schoolmistress* "the prettiest of poems" does not surprise one. Shenstone's careful homeliness, touched with an Arcadianism that preserved the common and familiar from becoming the barbarous or vulgar, approved itself to Lamb, and he called Shenstone's "the true rustic style." †

By Cunningham's time this democratic interest in humble people had found an expression correspondingly democratic. The difference is due in large part to the popularity of ballad literature, which by 1766 had familiarized people's ears with the ballad measure, while it had familiarized their minds with the idea of the dignity and beauty of a folk literature, and the possibility of dignity and beauty in a literary treatment of humble people in the real life of 18th century England. Addison's cautious liking for *Chevy Chase* and *The Babes in the Wood*, and for Henry Carey's popular ballad of the London streets,

^{*} 1737.

† Letters, ed. Ainger, vol. II, p. 44.

Sally in our Alley, had been succeeded by the frankly avowed and wide-spread taste for ballads old and new which is one of the chief signs of democratization going on in 18th century letters. The appearance of Percy's *Reliques* in 1765 was, in the immense impetus it gave to the "romantic" spirit in literature, the appearance of a new force in English letters; but it was also the mark of an already well developed interest and taste with already evident results in the literature of the day.

Democracy in letters means interest in common people; a realistic method and a strong feeling for the individual rather than the type, though not necessary to this interest, are likely to accompany it. But for forty years Shenstone's poem stood alone as a bit of individual portraiture from real life. In the literature of the country, and particularly in poetry of the country, such treatment was difficult. For prose and the humble life of the city, the way was more open and unrestricted. Later, when the new industrial life of England pressed for literary expression, it found a ready medium in the realistic novel, and the industrial laborer quickly became a familiar figure in letters. The agricultural laborer had not so easily found a place for himself. Restraint had been laid upon rural poetry by a firmly established literary tradition. Pope had decreed that the concern of the pastoral poet was not the actual business of the rustic, but rather "the tranquillity of a country life." Whatever labor the rustic might perform, he must lead a life of beauty, and of tranquil, uninterrupted peace. "Simplicity" must not become "rusticity;" the "plain" must not become the "clownish." Hence the long line of negative, pseudo-Arcadian Damons and Phillises who were made to serve as English swains and maidens for so many years, with real country characters only now and then elbowing their way to the center of the stage.

Prose, however, was under no such restrictions. On the contrary, Addison, the great model, had pointed the way to a handling of actual country life in his idyllic but convincingly real pictures of the gentle old country Squire, with his pleasant virtues and his endearing follies, of the

eccentric Will Wimble and the admirable Widow, of the little rural congregation over which Sir Roger ruled with such show of severity and such real kindness, of the village rustics, and of the gipsies who brought the stir of the outer world into the little community. The path to a sympathetic treatment of an actual country society and the outstanding individuals in it thus marked out by Addison was followed by the great novelists. Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, all took the country for their province.

Richardson's characters are mainly drawn from the middle rather than the lower classes. There is nothing revolutionary about his position; he presents the regulation middle class attitude toward the humble as well as toward the great: an acceptance of the right of the great to snub the less great, and the duty of the middle classes to toady to the high; and concerning the really humble the calmest acceptance of their appointment by God and Nature to serve faithfully the needs and comfort of an employing class. Pamela is spirited and determined and in a degree independent, but she is also disturbingly grateful for her exaltation in social rank and for the condescension of her wicked and tyrannous lover. Richardson's approval of Pamela's humble parents is characteristic of him. The only approbation which he finds it possible to bestow upon the lowly is for those qualities—the sole virtues he can conceive of their possessing—which relate to their connection with their masters.* An attitude toward the lower classes which regards not merely their usefulness to other classes or their contribution to national wealth, but which views them primarily as human beings with a capacity for satisfaction and enjoyment that demands development and gratification for its

* W. H. Hudson, *A Quiet Hour in a Library*, p. 193, gives an epitaph from a churchyard in a little Dorset village which he says reminded him of Richardson: "In memory of William Forder, who died July 21st, 1817, aged 54 years. His honesty, fidelity, and strict attention to the interests of his master and mistress, Francis Fane, Esq., and Mrs. Fane, for more than 30 years, are here recorded in testimony of their approbation and as an example to all whom Providence may place in a similar situation."

own sake, is beyond Richardson. He does give to the newly risen and rising middle classes such recognition, and he assigns to individual character in these classes the highest significance. He is the exponent of democracy, but it is a qualified democracy.*

Fielding's democratic spirit is more generous and thorough-going, with none of Richardson's sycophancy. Both his figures of lowly life and his country gentry surpass Richardson's in their individual appeal. Parson Adams, who beats Goldsmith's parson at the game of economy, being passing rich on only twenty pounds a year, and who rivals him in generosity and benevolence if not in gentleness; the guileless and gullible Squire Alworthy; the narrow-minded, intolerant, blustering Squire Western and his irascible sister,—these and many more are sympathetically drawn. Parson Trulliber, however, in his deceptiveness, and Justice Frolick, in his slavish carrying out of the will of a capricious and malevolent patroness, are among those characters whom Fielding makes utterly hateful as instruments of the oppression of the helpless country poor. Throughout Fielding's novels one is in the midst of a throng of common people whom one is conscious of as individuals. As a magistrate Fielding knew country affairs in England thoroughly, but the class interest which this knowledge gave him as a reformer, did not lead him as an artist to forget the significance of the individual.

The prepossession against which this democratic spirit had to make its way in literature has already been considered, so far as the countryman was concerned. More generally it appeared in that literary theory which had for ages assigned to the rôle of tragedy only the illustrious and nobly born; the "middling sort of people," considered incapable of deep emotion or high passion, were to be exhibited only in comedy. Goldsmith, for all his own personal warmth of feeling and readiness of sympathy, asserts it to be a rule "having the strongest foundation

* The peculiarly undemocratic phase of the rise of the middle classes as this change concerned the country laborer has already been pointed out. See *ante*, p. 37-38.

in nature" that "the distresses of the mean by no means affect us so strongly as the calamities of the great." A literary theory of this kind, having its root in social convictions and closely bound up with social practice, is very slowly displaced. It was in this case a powerful ally of the superciliousness of a fashionable London society, of the easy superiority of the ruling and employing class, of a profound sense of the unshakableness of England's greatness and the happiness of her free people.

Fielding's work is one of the strongest possible signs of a break in the solid fabric of this accepted idea. Other signs were such things as Lillo's *George Barnwell*, which in its use of a humble city apprentice as the hero of a tragedy marked a new spirit; Henry Carey's ballad, *Sally in our Alley*, which grew out of its author's desire to set forth "the Beauty of a chaste and disinterested Passion, even in the lowest class of Human Life," and for which Carey gathered his material by actually following a young couple about the streets on a holiday; Carey's ballad-opera, *Nancy*, or *The Parting Lovers*, the nature of which is indicated by other names sometimes given it, *The Press Gang* and *True Blue*; and, not to leave Hamlet out of *Hamlet*, Gay's *Blackeyed Susan* and *Beggar's Opera*, the prototypes and instigators of the host of ballads and operas represented by those of Carey. All these things were immensely popular and influential. In spite of all hostile prepossessions, both literary and social, the democratic spirit was making headway in letters, and under its influence country shared with city in public attention.

The satirist and the reformer had their part in the development of a literature of country life. In 1735 Soame Jenyns wrote an *Epistle from S. J., Esq., in the Country, to the Right Honorable the Lord Lovelace in Town*. His contrast of country life as it was, and as it had been

"when mother Time
Though now grown old, was in her prime,"

is far from flattering to his own day. Then,

"How happy was a country life!
How free from wickedness and strife!

Then each man lived upon his farm,
 And thought and did no mortal harm; . . .
 But now, whatever poets write,
 Tis sure the case is alter'd quite;
 Virtue no more in rural plains,
 Or innocence or peace remains;
 But vice is in the cottage found,
 And country girls are oft unsound:
 Fierce party rage each village fires,
 With wars of justices and squires:
 Attorneys, for a barley straw,
 Whole ages hamper folks in law;
 And every neighbour's in a flame
 About their rates, or tythes, or game:
 Some quarrel for their hares and pigeons,
 And some for diff'rence in religions."

He goes on amusingly to present himself as a sort of Mr. Bennett among country gentlemen, sharing little in the diversions or cares of his neighbors, but getting no small entertainment, evidently, out of their follies and absurdities. He gives a lively description of the hubbub he creates when he tries to call on a country lady without having previously announced his visit: he lets nothing go by unnoticed, from the tramping about over his head as the lady makes her toilette to receive him, and the clatter of fowls, geese, and pigs as they are being caught and killed for his feasting later, to the lagging dinner and slower conversation and toasts, and his return home behind a

"coachman tolerably drunk,
 Whirling o'er hillocks, ruts, and stones,
 Enough to dislocate one's bones."

He describes his real recreation, books, and concludes with the hope that Lord Lovelace

"Would sometimes kindly condescend
 To visit a dull country friend."

In 1740 William Somerville, best known for his *Chase* and *Field Sports*, poems "describing all the more polite entertainments of the field," published a poem dealing with the ruder games of villagers. *Hobbinol, or The Rural*

Games, offered a better chance for the portrayal of country life than anything since the *Shepherd's Week*. Like the *Shepherd's Week*, it was burlesque, but in the mock-heroic style and Miltonic verse of John Philips, and with a serious moral purpose. The poet's dedication, to Mr. Hogarth, announces his aim to be the ridicule of vice and folly, and his Preface declares his program more particularly. As the poets of almost all nations have celebrated the sports of their several countries (even Milton has found room for descriptions of this sort, though his sports are indeed the sports of angels), so Somerville proposes to "do justice to his Countrymen the BRITISH Freeholders, who, when dressed in their Holyday Cloaths, are by no means Persons of a despicable Figure, but eat and drink as plentifully, and fight as heartily, as the greatest Heroe in the Iliad." Since the brutality of English sports is a sad indication of the genius of the English nation, Somerville "has Reason to hope that no honest Man, who loves his Country, will think this short Reproof out of Season: For perhaps this merry Way of bantering Men into Virtue, may have a better Effect, than the most serious Admonitions; since many who are proud to be thought Immoral, are not very fond of being Ridiculous."

The difficulty of his task, on the literary side, Somerville recognized in his Preface: "the writer in this kind of burlesque must not only keep up the pomp and dignity of the style, but an artful sneer should appear through the whole." As a matter of fact the dignity and the sneer and the moral purpose together proved too much for Somerville, and the significance of the poem must be said to lie more in its unconscious and involuntary revelations than in the accomplishment of its avowed purpose. A country gentleman, writing verses to please himself and careless as to their publication, an imitator, a literary as well as social "stand-patter," Somerville might easily have added new tuneful and insipid and unreal Colins and Celias to the English stock of singing shepherds and shepherdesses. But a practical and moral turn of mind led him to view country people as they were and to present them as he knew them, though unfortunately through the beclouding

medium of burlesque. Original or innovating he could not be, but at least his subject matter is from life.

The fight of the crowd at the village games in Canto II exhibits his realistic method. The account is unsparing in its details of "pounded teeth and clotted gore." The fight rages on until it is stopped by the Justice, Sir Rhadamanth, an official

"to every wanton clown
"Severe, indulgent to himself alone."

Somerville cherishes no vain ideal of the countryman's unassailable virtue. At the very hour of his triumph the gallant young Hobbinol is confronted with such tragic evidence of a guilty life as fate narrowly averted from Godfrey Cass in *Silas Marner*. Mopsa, miserable figure of a betrayed and deserted woman, appears with her two wretched children to accuse him of his guilt, and the poem closes with the flight of his sweet-heart, Ganderetta, and his own arrest.

Somerville's "merry bantering" is, by the nature of mock-heroic, too long drawn out to be easily represented by quotation. Several pages describe the picnic dinner, a soberly indigestible meal rather than a riotous feast,— "good eating expedient for heroes," says the Argument of Canto III. Two passages will perhaps show the best of Somerville. In the first he has almost forgotten his burlesque, and furnishes an involuntarily true picture of that early village society, yet undisturbed, in which differences of rank easily disappeared and a whole community united in festal celebration. The passage begins the description of the May-day crowd:

"See on yon verdant lawn the gath'ring crowd
Thickens amain; the buxom nymphs advance
Usher'd by jolly clowns: distinctions cease
Lost in the common joy, and the bold slave
Leans on his wealthy master unrepov'd:
The sick no pains can feel, no wants the poor." *

The second passage shows Somerville's best burlesque.

* Canto II, 11, 111-116.

It sketches Twangdillo, the old fiddler, with genuine comic touch. He was a battered old soldier:

"One leg on Ister's banks the hardy swain
Left undismay'd, Bellona's lightning scorch'd
His manly visage, but in pity left
One eye secure. . . .
Yet still the merry bard without regret
Bears his own ills, and with his sounding shell
And comic phiz relieves his drooping friends.
Hark! from aloft his tortur'd catgut squeals,
He tickles ev'ry string, to ev'ry note
He bends his pliant neck, his single eye
Twinkles with joy, his active stump beats time:
Let but this subtle artist softly touch
The trembling chords, and the faint expiring swain
Trembles no less, and the fond yielding maid
Is tweedled into love."*

If Somerville had been less completely a country squire or more genuinely a poet he might have given us, in a poem of the underlying idea of *Hobbinol*, not indeed Goldsmith's affectionate and personal pictures, but something like Crabbe's keen and penetrating insight into a village society. He was in the direct way of it in subject matter. But he belonged to the landlord class; his instinctive attitude toward the peasantry was a disapproval of their roughness in manners and morals, and he had not the imagination which could reveal to him the profound significance of their individual lives. *Hobbinol* is a manifestation of interest in common people; but still more significantly it is an illustration of the difficulties in the way of such interest on the part of that class who possessed the greatest power over the lives and fortunes of common people.

What the country landlord thought of the rustics, the city thought of country squires. Alongside of Sir Roger and Squire Alworthy must be put others of a less endearing type. Fastidious Horace Walpole stared at the "mountains of roast beef . . . just roughly hewn out into the outlines of human form" about his father's table, and exclaimed: "Why, I'll swear I see no difference

* Canto I, II, 133-139.

between a country gentleman and a sirloin. . . . Indeed the sirloin does not ask quite so many questions." Ignorant, blustering, tyrannical, dull, often immoral, with enormous appetite for food and unlimited capacity for drink, profuse and prodigal,—so the Squire is too often represented. In 1732 Richard Gwinnet produced privately a comedy, *The Country Squire, or, A Christmas Gambol*, intended "to reprehend a spirit of profuseness and prodigality." The piece is a sort of "humour" comedy, each character presenting some one dominant trait. The Squire is big and hearty and generous and dull, the sport and prey of his rascally guests. In form the comedy is, as its author notes in his Preface, out of harmony with the comedies appearing on the regular stage of the day, but sincerely expressive of his judgment of existing conditions. Bickerstaffe's *Thomas and Sally, or The Sailor's Return*, contains a rascally old Squire whose machinations, encouraged by an old woman of much the character of Mrs. Jenkins in *Pamela*, are defeated by the opportune return of the heroine's sailor lover.

In some comedies the Squire is shown on a visit to the city, where he is the easy victim of sharpers and practical jokers. So, for example, in Henry Carey's *A Wonder, or The Honest Yorkshire Man*, a ballad-opera published in 1743. Here the country Squire, a young fellow lubberly enough, but without the honesty traditionally attaching to rusticity, is fooled at every turn; he loses the girl he has hoped to marry, as well as a certain estate, which goes, along with his sweet-heart, to the man to whom it rightfully belongs. Such a plot is of course not new, and the figure of the country gull has in it much of the traditional, but there is a realism about Carey's sketch which gives it a convincing appearance of actuality. The same may be said about the Squires in George Saville Carey's two operas, *The Nut-Brown Maid* and *The Cottagers*.*

Such pictures of the country Squire are in part no doubt survivors from the comedies of an earlier day when country gentry came much less often to the city than in the middle of the 18th century. By this time the unfat-

* Published in *Analects in Verse and Prose*, 1770.

miliarity of city and country people with each other * was being broken down; the difficulty of travel was still very great,† but at least in the neighborhood of London there was a considerable visiting of the country by city people, and the increased financial prosperity of the country landlords made possible for them a greater indulgence in the enjoyments of the city. Indeed, literature has more than a few complaints of the desertion of the country by the country gentry, and the luxury and wastefulness of their city lives. At any rate, such pictures of the country Squire are not conspicuously out of harmony with those afforded by Fielding and others.

Their truthfulness is supported also by a little group of satirical poems which, it may be assumed, still more directly reflect popular opinion. One of these is Soame Jenyns's political eclogue, *The Squire and the Parson*, written on the conclusion of the peace in 1748. Charles Lamb had perhaps missed this poem in his volume of Jenyns before he consigned the whole to the list of "books which are no books." For though imperfect in some details of workmanship, the poem is successful as a vigorous bit of satire, offering a shrewd estimate of the actual character, aims, and political and moral ideas of these two representatives of the governing classes in the country. Its alliance is with Fielding rather than with Addison, with Crabbe and Ebenezer Elliott rather than with Goldsmith.

Dramatically the poem is effective; its characters reveal themselves involuntarily and completely. The Squire is sitting by his hall-chimney, gloomily revolving

* Macaulay, writing for the year 1685, notes that city people did not spend some months of every year in the country, and country gentry had not the money for frequent visits to the city, hence their lack of knowledge of each other, and hence the stock picture in comedy of the countryman in town. Difficulties of travel added to their separation.

† See the description of Squire Western's coach and four and the riskiness of travel in it, and see Soame Jenyns' account of his ride home over country roads; in 1752 complaint was made that country gentry residing in the city could not even visit their estates (Webb, Sidney and Beatrice, *English Local Government, The Parish and the Country*, p. 73); Jane Austen's *Emma*, of a still later day, had never seen the ocean, though she lived within twenty miles of it and longed for a sight of it.

debts and taxes in his mind; his pipe, a beer-stained
London Post, and a tattered Bible

“on whose remnants torn
Each parish round was annually forsworn,”

lie on the table near him. The Parson enters, and readily falling into his friend's mood, makes his own complaint of a world in which Faith is stifled by Reason, and the Church is shorn of its authority. But the Squire is in no mood to listen to other men's troubles, and cuts him short ungraciously:

“Come, preach no more, but drink and hold your tongue:
I'm for the Church:—but think the parsons wrong.”

Unsilenced, the Parson finds in this a new illustration of the rank growth of free-thinking and the readiness of Squires, and their tenants too, “profane as lords” to laugh at every sacred thing. But they drink together, grumpily, to Church and State, and proceed with their ill-natured sparring. They are interrupted by the bringing of a letter to the Squire from one Sly, who covets a living in the Squire's gift which is about to become vacant; since Squab is going to die, Sly thinks it no harm to ask the living for himself. The Squire, in his mood of irritation with the Parson, is inclined to look with favor upon this request, but the Parson quickly takes the alarm, reminds the Squire that the living has long been promised to him, backs down from his attitude of criticism, finds himself suddenly in perfect accord with all the Squire's opinions, both political and religious, and secures a renewed promise of the living in question. The poem gives a convincing and an amusing picture of the bullying Squire and the toadying Parson.

Among Shenstone's *Levities* occurs a trifling thing with the title *A Simile*, which also reflects the current opinion of the Squire. The “simile” is this: as the clumsy brute used in the village sport of bear-baiting has been licked into shape by his dam,

“Who, with her plastic tongue alone,
Produced a visage—like her own,”

so the country Squire is the product of his mother's training. The awkward boy, the pride and hope of the parish, has been subjected to maternal training,—

“Forbid for fear of sense to roam,
And taught by kind Mamma at home,”—

with the result that

“In sense the same, in stature higher,
He shines ere long, a rural squire,
Pours forth unwitty jokes and swears,
And bawls, and drinks, but chiefly stares:
His tenants of superior sense
Carouse, and laugh, at his expense,
And deem the pastime I'm relating
To be as pleasant as bear-baiting.”

Smart's fable of *The Country Squire and the Mandrake* (1752) offers one more bit of evidence. Squire Trelooby is one morning striding with his dog and gun through the wood, blind to its beauty and deaf to its music.

“At length, while poring on the ground,
With monumental look profound,
A curious vegetable caught
His—something similar to thought.”

The Squire bent over and stared fixedly at the Mandrake until it, in resentment of his rudeness, addressed him angrily:

“Disdainful though thou look'st on me,
What art thou, or what can'st thou be?
Nature, that marked thee as a fool,
Gave no materials for the school.
In what consists thy work and frame?
The preservation of the game.—
For what? thou avaricious elf,
But to destroy it all thyself;
To lead a life of drink and feast,
T' oppress the poor, and cheat the priest,
Or triumph in a virgin lost,
Is all the manhood thou can'st boast,—
Pretty, in Nature's various plan,
To see a weed that's like a man;
But 'tis a grievous thing indeed,
To see a man so like a weed.”

In quite a different tone but reflecting the same spirit of criticism, is Akenside's Ode *To the Country Gentlemen of Europe*, 1758. It is not the crudity and ignorance of the country squire that he is condemning, but the failure of country gentlemen to fill their rightful place as leaders in affairs. He laments the loss of spirit among the country people of England as displayed in their unmartial attitude. "Doth valour to the race no more belong?" The army has now to be made up of hirelings, who learn all the lessons of the field and win all its glories, while England's free men feel the task too arduous. This is the fault, says Akenside, of the country gentlemen, who leave their country homes for riotous lives in London.

"And yet full oft your anxious tongues complain
That lawless tumult prompts the rustic throng;
That the rude village inmates now disdain
Those homely ties which ruled their fathers long.
Alas, your fathers did by other arts
Draw those kind ties around their simple hearts,
And led in other paths their ductile will;
By succour, faithful counsel, courteous cheer,
Won them the ancient manners to revere,
To prize their country's peace, and Heaven's due rites fulfil."

What Sir Roger de Coverley is to Justice Frolick and his kind, Gray's exquisite appreciation of a village society in the *Elegy* is to Somerville's harsh criticism in *Hobbinol*. Class feeling is in it, but not condescension; it is the cordial recognition by a member of one social class of the characteristic excellence of another. Gray and Milton have sometimes been coupled together as the greatest of the poets of the country before Goldsmith and Burns. Milton wrote in *L'Allegro* an objective description of a country life from the point of view of a personal enjoyment; Gray shared the habit of his age in looking upon a village community as a social unit, representative of an important element in the national life. In substance the *Elegy* is not remarkably original; its moralizings on life and ambition are common to much of the poetry of the century; its mood of melancholy marks its affiliation with a well defined school of contemporary poetry; its picture

of the villagers, with their rugged strength and virtue, the beauty and simplicity of their living, is traditional; its particular scenes of evening and release from toil, of household joys and the happy labor of farmer and woodsman, are familiar. Yet the consummate beauty of the poem gave it supreme distinction, and it imparted new dignity and popularity to the village theme. The appeal of this subject matter, familiar in burlesque, in satire, in comic opera and burletta, in ballad and fable and song, to a poet of the academic type like Gray, steeped in the classics, marks the degree to which the democratic movement in letters had advanced by 1750.

"It is to be shown why the humanitarian pastoral started in England," says Harold Elmer Mantz, in *Modern Language Publications* for September, 1916. By the humanitarian pastoral Mr. Mantz apparently means the pastoral which has cut loose from its classic bonds and taken on an interest in living men and contemporary social conditions. The explanation is to be found in the state of English feeling toward the country and its people, taken in connection with other facts of the history of the time. Never had literature been in more immediate contact with national thought and public policies than it was from the outset of the 18th century. Writers, freed in some measure from personal dependence upon the bounty of patrons, became the political followers of great men and their spokesmen in political, religious, and intellectual matters. The crisis of the great Revolution past, parliamentary and party government securely established, the liberties of the people safe in their own keeping, the nation was free for a social development to match its political progress. And in spite of much political discussion and activity, it was the social aspect of national life that absorbed men's attention. Essayists, poets, novelists, all discussed the social phenomena of the time.

Further, the wars which were going on during a large part of the century were all fought on foreign soil and offered no great hindrance to national advancement, and excited at home only a secondary interest. A rapid industrial development was in progress. Wealth was

increasing, the merchant classes growing in importance and power, and the capitalistic system strengthening its hold; land was changing hands and new country families being established. Land ownership was still the basis of social standing, and the new bourgeois commercial class was acquiring land with all possible speed. In the midst of a changing order like this, national consciousness could not but be high. England was proud of her liberties, of her free institutions, of her material prosperity and her culture. Social questions were approached from the angle of a consideration of national welfare.

Again, the whole century was eminently rationalistic. Order, system, clarity, correctness were the intellectual virtues. In literature it was an age which naturally sought a beauty of the classic type and by the following of Greek and Roman models, and in the course of this following readily developed an English pastoral in the classic convention. But the practical genius of the race, acting in conjunction with the strong national feeling of the time, tended to the breaking down of this convention by the introduction of more and more English and realistic material. Circumstances both literary and social drew attention to the agricultural laborer and to the country gentry, and together they figured as forming a social group important to England as an element in the beauty of her life, as an institution necessary to her greatness, and finally as a problem for her solution. Out of a combination of circumstances peculiar to England, therefore, arose the type of rural poetry which may be called the "humanitarian pastoral," and out of a situation new to England in the 18th century arose the consideration of the rustic not as an individual but as the representative of a social group.

We have talked of the "democratization of letters" seen in England during this same century. The age itself was by no means a democratic one; some of its aristocratic prepossessions we have noticed. It should be emphasized again that politically the democratization going on extended only so far as to the middle classes; government was still by and for a class. Tillers of the

soil were aware of changes only as the conditions of their own lives grew more difficult and as new perplexities and hardships came upon them. In literature the process of democratization presents much the same limitations. It was a very real process: humble people were finding their way into literature. Farquar went straight to his own experience with actual people for his *Recruiting Officer* at the beginning of the century, and the theme of soldiering, of enlistment and impressment, became of frequent use in later drama and poetry and song; rustic dialect, Yorkshire, Scottish, and what not, appeared; the ideas of country folk, their superstitions and charms, their activities and recreations, took on new interest; the character of the rural population became a concern of the nation; ballad and song and fable pressed hard upon more dignified and aristocratic versification and utilized the new theme; and in the city lowly life was receiving similar recognition and attention.

All this constitutes a genuine process of democratization. Yet the limitations of the process are no less genuine. Much of this literature has only a partial sympathy and understanding. Gay's knowledge of country life and his liking for country people are certain, but his attitude is flippant; Thomson is appreciative, but moralizing and remote; Somerville is only critical; Gray is academic; Hammond, Parnell, the Wartons, and many dramatists are conventional and superficial. On the other hand, John Cunningham might be the next door neighbor to his Miller, and at least the friendly employer of his young couple at the fair. Some few ruder poems, such as *Snaith Marsh* and *The Contented Clown*,* bear marks of rustic authorship. And in Goldsmith, at the beginning of the last third of the century, we find the strength and the folly, the beauties and the absurdities, of rustic characters set forth with equal pleasure in both. Crabbe and Cowper and Burns follow.

Meanwhile, the great change in the village from coöperative to competitive, with all the train of disaster which it brought in its wake, had been proceeding steadily.

* *Post*, p. 119 and p. 121.

From the mediæval system of a sharing together in common lands, common tools, common activities, and common interests, to the present competitive system, with its sharp social distinctions, its complete domination of master over man, and among its laborers the principle of every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost, the break is almost absolute. The old order did not, to be sure, go to pieces without a long course of premonitory minor changes, but its final dissolution came with a suddenness which meant catastrophe to thousands and thousands of helpless and bewildered villagers. Literature, which always lags behind events, long persisted in picturing the old order, and it is the old village which in the very days of its disappearance from the land, came into a new life in the literature of the nation. Appearing in hints and glimpses early in the century, and treated with an idyllicism born of a long pastoral tradition, it gained steadily in fullness and clearness and reality of treatment with the growing nationalization of literary themes throughout the century. Finally, in the hands of a man of genius, the village theme emerged from casual and desultory treatment into a distinctness and permanence which it has never lost. And it was the old village of a happy community life to which Goldsmith, in indignation and distress at a devastation wrought by forces which he only dimly understood, gave imperishable expression.

CHAPTER IV

THE VILLAGE ESTABLISHED IN LITERATURE, 1770-1800

As we have seen, men began to write of the village long before its affairs had reached anything like acuteness, and quite independently of its current history. It was a literary fashion that led Gay to the writing of his *Rural Sports*, a literary quarrel which set him upon his *Shepherd's Week*, and a literary opportunity cleverly perceived that inspired him to make capital of his sympathetic understanding of lowly life whether in city or country. Thomson was attracted to the country by qualities not peculiar to his own time. Gray wrote with an eye to the requirements and possibilities of elegiac verse rather than out of a concern for any new factors in village life. Somerville saw no cause but natural depravity for the roughness of manners and coarseness of morals which he deprecated in English peasants. Comedy writers found in country life either an unruffled content, or the crudity and coarseness, ignorance and gullibility, which stage tradition imputed to country characters. Shenstone's *Schoolmistress* and Cunningham's *Miller* were figures of personal memory and enjoyment.

Recognition of the trend of events in contemporary affairs was certainly no necessary literary motive. But just as in the poetry of nature direct observation and fresh detail made their way in the midst of bookish and accepted traditions, so in the treatment of simple people in a setting of nature much that was realistic entered, and even in that literature farthest from social motivation a fair picture of village life is presented. Wherever the purpose is didactic, as in Somerville's *Hobbinol*, or the tone satirical, as in certain poems of Jenyns and Smart, the comedies of Bickerstaffe, or the novels of Fielding and Smollett, the relation to immediate conditions and events is of course closer. But it is nowhere more immediate and

essential than in the work of the poet to whom the subsequent literature of the village owes its greatest debt. The *Deserted Village* contains the essence of all that has been written since 1770 concerning the village and villagers of England; it contains the germ of that literature of a restricted locality, of a simple and unsophisticated society, which constitutes village literature in its essence. Realism may replace idyllicism, the locality may change in character, the literary medium may become widely different, but the fundamental theme of it all is that which found its first clear expression in Goldsmith's poem.

The *Vicar of Wakefield*, written three years earlier, being of the country is hence necessarily in a sense also of the village. The twenty acres in which Dr. Primrose and his son daily "pursued their usual industry abroad" lay in a region of small farms, whose owners "tilled their own grounds, and were equal strangers to opulence and poverty." Having almost all the conveniences of life within themselves they seldom visited towns or cities, only travelling off to an occasional fair, from which they usually returned poorer and wiser. Simple, frugal, and temperate, they worked and played with equal cheerfulness and enjoyment. They danced upon the green, they played at hot-cockles and hunt-the-slipper, bawling with mirth and "blowzed" with exercise; they put their faith in the tales of gipsy fortune tellers; they told tales and sang ballads in the field and by the fireside; they did due honor to their Squire and reverence to their Parson. All this is descriptive of village life at its happiest and best. Yet the *Vicar of Wakefield* is of course primarily a domestic novel: the group it depicts is the family rather than the village. Moreover it is the parish and not the village that supplies the *locus* for the action. It was reserved for the *Deserted Village* to combine individual portraiture with the picture of a community life, and to present both with such sweetness, such affection, and such art as to give the theme of the village a quite new and distinct place in literature.

Like all other poems of country life in the 18th century, the *Deserted Village* came out of London. But it came

from the hand of a man whose sympathies were naturally with the life of rural England more than were those of most of the men in his London group. Born in the country, he had lived all his early years in a country village; he had travelled afoot through Europe, and knew well the rural districts of France, Switzerland, and Holland; he made country excursions habitually during his life in London; his dearest memories were of village folk,—his father, his brother Henry, his uncle Contarine: all his experience served to foster and quicken his sympathy for the villager, and to further his understanding of the villager's character, ambitions, habits of mind and of living. The villages he saw in his country excursions out of London had for him no mere objective beauty, but the subtler charm imparted by association and glorifying memory. A village deserted, a village society scattered, cottages pulled down, old paths and lanes overgrown and unfrequented, spoke to him not of increased national productiveness or wealth, but of ties of family and affection broken, happy intercourse ended, hopes destroyed and hearts made sick. What he saw was not a minor misfortune incident to a great national forward movement, but from every point of view unqualified loss.

Goldsmith was not much of a theorizer; he was not a politician or a reformer, he was a poet. His philosophy of life was simple and of the kind drawn naturally from his own experience and his observation of men and things, but he held to it with a rather notable independence of the opinions of men about him. For the ills that he deplored he had only a general explanation and only a vague and indefinite solution to offer. Yet he did faithfully present a picture true to the facts that he knew, and in doing this he wrote more truly and prophetically than perhaps even he understood; certainly with greater discernment than his own friends gave him credit for. "I know you will object," he says to Sir Joshua Reynolds in his Dedication, "and indeed several of our best and wisest friends concur in the opinion—that the depopulation it deplores is nowhere to be seen, and the disorders it laments are only to be found in the poet's imagination."

In reply to this objection, which his friends had taught him to expect from the public, he does not offer statistics, or reports from parish authorities, but simply the fact of his own observation, which there seems to be no reason for our distrusting. "To this I scarce make any other answer," he says, "than that I sincerely believe what I have written; that I have taken all possible pains in my country excursions for these four or five years past to be certain of what I allege, and that all my views and inquiries have led me to believe those miseries real which I here attempt to display." Cooke reports Goldsmith to have said the same thing to him: "Some of my friends differ with me on this plan, and think this depopulation of villages does not exist—but I am satisfied of the fact. I remember it in my own country, and have seen it in this." *

Austin Dobson † finds that "in such anxiety to show cause, there is an accent of doubt." Rather does it seem that Goldsmith was well aware of the hostility likely to be shown to his picture of existing conditions, but so convinced of its truthfulness as to be wholly unwilling to modify it. Dobson thinks of no incident in Goldsmith's experience likely to stand back of this poem except the well known one of General Napier, who for the sake of extending his own estate displaced a number of cottages in the vicinity of Lissoy. "None of his biographers," he asserts, "have brought forward any of that evidence which he affirmed he had collected, of similar enormities in England."

But what sort of "evidence" does Goldsmith anywhere affirm he has "collected?" Why should he have noted down his data? If in his "country excursions" he saw village after village in the process of decay, villagers living in miserable poverty and distress, the old rustic independence and heartiness and cheer giving way to dependence and sullenness and gloom, these facts would register themselves on his mind and heart beyond any need of note-book and numbers and dates to fix or verify.

* Quoted by Austin Dobson, *Life of Goldsmith*, Great Writers Series, 1888, p. 150.

† Ibid, p. 150.

They were, in the form of his own knowledge and feeling, material for poetry, and he cared for nothing beyond this. Even in the justification of himself against anticipated criticism, he does not offer proof in the shape of detailed facts; he says, "I should prove myself, at best, an indifferent politician to tire the reader with a long preface, when I want his unfatigued attention to a long poem," and contents himself with affirming his good faith in the picture he is about to draw. Where he says anything to indicate that we may look for the kind of evidence that Mr. Dobson finds damagingly absent, I have to discover.

Mr. Dobson's tone of incredulity has been that very generally taken by critics of the *Deserted Village* in connection with its historical truth. Macaulay's famous article for the *Encyclopedia Britannica* still retains, as revised by Mr. Dobson for the eleventh edition, his easy dictum that the poem is "made up of two incongruous parts. The village in its happy days is a true English village. The village in its decay is an Irish village. The felicity and the misery which Goldsmith has brought close together belong to two different countries and to two different stages in the progress of society. He had assuredly never seen in England all the inhabitants of such a paradise turned out of their homes in one day and forced to emigrate in a body to America. The hamlet he had probably seen in Kent; the ejection he had probably seen in Munster; but by joining the two he has produced something which never was and never will be seen in any part of the world." Macaulay finds this incongruity the one unpardonable fault of the poem. He thinks Goldsmith's "theory about wealth and luxury which has so often been censured by political economists" is bad enough; it is indeed false, he says, but this is forgivable. "A poet may easily be pardoned for reasoning ill; but he cannot be pardoned for describing ill, for observing the world in which he lives so carelessly that his portraits bear no resemblance to the originals, for exhibiting as copies from real life monstrous combinations of things which never were and never could be found together."

So William Black, in his volume on Goldsmith in the English Men of Letters series.* "The crisis comes. Auburn *delenda est*. Here, no doubt, occurs the least probable part of the poem." He goes on to speak of poverty of soil as a common cause of emigration: such soil naturally discharges its surplus population as families increase; there is a wrench of parting which is painful enough, but the usual result is a change from starvation to competence. This Black suggests as one alternative in explanation of the desertion of Auburn; the other he takes to be eviction for the sake of adding to a great man's estate. This last he says is infrequent but actual, and he gives an instance of its happening within twenty years in his own knowledge. "This is not sufficient, however, to support the theory that wealth and luxury are inimical to the existence of a hardy peasantry." So Black takes the desertion of Auburn to be due to "poetical exigency." It was necessary in order to provide the poet a chance to express his economic theory and to call up pensive reminiscence of his early days.

Mr. Frankfort Moore, in his life of Goldsmith, 1910, echoes the same kind of statements. He quotes someone (unnamed) to whom Goldsmith had, in confiding to him the plan of his poem, stated that he had actually known of an incident of eviction. Moore adds, "We do not believe that Goldsmith said anything of the sort. But he had imagination enough to be able to picture such an incident, and not only its consequences, but its origin as well." It was probably true, says Moore, that in the course of Goldsmith's vagrancy, he came upon half a dozen cottages in ruins. "The exigencies of art required a picturesque record of those who suffered by the demolition of the cabins, and of their sufferings, and the poet proved himself equal to the occasion."

But is, perhaps, the whole matter of this criticism unimportant, and the question as to the facts behind Goldsmith's representation an idle one? Is Mr. Moore right when he says, "It does not seem to us to be any more necessary to discuss what foundation the author had for

* P. 119.

his story for the desertion of Auburn than it is to discuss the source of his story of the desertion of the Wakefield Vicarage by Olivia Primrose. Goldsmith was as fully entitled to write of the one as of the other."

Certainly no one would dissent from Mr. Dobson's dictum, in the article on Goldsmith in the tenth volume of the *Cambridge Literature*, 1913, that "the poem holds us by the humanity of its character pictures, by its delightful rural descriptions, by the tender melancholy of its metrical cadences." The world has no doubt shown instinctive wisdom in forgetting Goldsmith's didactic motive in the higher value of his poetry. Yet for the student of literature in its historical significance,—who may join with the rest of the world in the matter of aesthetic enjoyment,—this is not the whole of the matter. For him it is important also to relate the poem to that body of fact which research in English social history has within the last ten years brought to view. Of course Goldsmith was as fully entitled to write of the desertion of Auburn as of the desertion of the Wakefield Parsonage by Olivia Primrose. He was by no means entitled to write of the two incidents with the same freedom of fancy. An occurrence represented as involving typically the experience of a whole class of English people, and used as the basis of judgment passed upon national policies and national character, must be true, not merely to the larger laws of human nature, as in the case of a purely individual incident, but to immediate and external facts. A poem which proposes to itself an aim of this kind may be treasured for its beauty of verse, its skill in portraiture, or any other quality of purely aesthetic and personal appeal, but to possess also the value of a social and historical significance, it must be true to the facts of the life which it depicts.

In the light of the events related in the preceding chapter it is no longer possible to dismiss Goldsmith's picture of a ruined village with easy condemnation as fanciful and untrue. "Goldsmith looked into his heart, and wrote," says Forster.* So he did; he also looked into the English

* *The Life of Oliver Goldsmith*, Book IV, Chapter VII; Jefferson Press edition, 1871, p. 207.

country about London, and wrote. The *Deserted Village* was written in 1768-1770; the observations of which Goldsmith speaks as the basis of the poem cover the middle years of the decade. By this time the agrarian revolution was well under way, and local depopulation, with all that this involved, was evident enough. The greatest ills had not yet overtaken the country, but the trend of affairs was unmistakable. Evictions by lords, or by newly rich land-holders eager to surround themselves with all outer evidences of social rank, were already frequent enough to supply Goldsmith with fact upon which to base the poetic fiction of Auburn's desertion.

That it was this kind of an incident that Goldsmith had in mind is clear from such lines as these:

"One only master grasps the whole domain,
And half a tillage stints the smiling plain."

"The man of wealth and pride
Takes up a space that many poor supplied—
Space for his lake, his park's extended bounds,
Space for his horses, equipage, and hounds:
The robe that wraps his limbs in silken sloth,
Has robb'd the neighbouring fields of half their growth;
His seat, where solitary sports are seen,
Indignant spurns the cottage from the green."

Yet the Dedication shows that it was a general state of affairs rather than a single type of incident that Goldsmith had in mind; he was more concerned with the motive and the results than with the means. But motive and results are of a piece with those attaching to a more frequent cause of depopulation, enclosure, which Goldsmith merely glances at in inquiring the fate of the banished villagers.

"Where then, ah! where shall poverty reside,
To scape the pressure of contiguous pride?
If to some common's fenceless limits strayed,
He drives his flocks to pick the scanty blade,
Those fenceless fields the sons of wealth divide,
And even the bare-worn common is denied."

Very probably much of the depopulation of villages which Goldsmith saw was due to enclosure and the engrossment

of farms, but that he actually saw the conditions he describes, there can be no reasonable doubt.

Even Goldsmith's economic theory appears at this time less utterly absurd than in the past it has commonly been regarded to be. When every historian of the age, both contemporary and subsequent, lists among the causes for the prevailing social ills in rural life at this time a conspicuous growth in luxury and in extravagant standards of living among all classes except the lowest, one is rather inclined to take sympathetically Goldsmith's simple statement that where wealth accumulates men decay. Not that silk garments and elegant carriages exercise an immediate effect of disintegration upon character; not that it is immoral to be comfortable. But when farmers were using every means to reach and maintain the style of living formerly belonging to the smaller gentry, and the smaller gentry aping the higher, city landlords pressing for rent from farmers to support their own careers of self-indulgence and folly, when provisions were kept at prices prohibitive for laborers for the sake of adding wealth to the nation—that is to say, to that part of it which regarded itself as the nation,—then manhood somewhere was bound to decay. It may have been only the peasantry, who lost their independence and the ability to exercise that capacity which Goldsmith so proudly attributed to them in the *Traveller*:

“While even the peasant boasts these rights to scan,
And learns to venerate himself as man.”

But it may also be that “decay” is not too strong a word by which to describe the loss of sympathy, the hardness and callousness of the ruling classes toward the distresses which they were themselves causing. As an economic theory Goldsmith's explanation was certainly lacking in explicitness; it was merely a large and simple generalization. But however poor political economy it may be, it does seem, in the light of known facts, exceedingly good sense.

And the condemnation which he passed in the *Traveller* upon the development of class rule in England, is more

clearly than ever seen to have been justified. When Goldsmith beheld

“a factious band agree
To call it freedom when themselves are free;
Each wanton judge new penal statutes draw,
Laws grind the poor, and rich men rule the law,”

the situation appeared to him so mischievous and so obnoxious that he felt it to be worse than the tyranny of kings. It was in reality, as we see now more plainly than ever, responsible for many of the particular ills which Goldsmith deplored,—harsh penal statutes, shocking prison conditions, the oppression and ruin of many men whose prosperity and whose manhood the state could ill afford to lose.

The English public did not see what Goldsmith saw. If it had, the current of events would not have flowed so steadily forward to the flood of disaster that swept over rural England thirty and forty and fifty years later. And Goldsmith was not the type of poet to rouse the public to a burning sense of injustice or of danger. With all his independence he was very much a man of his time. Accepting the current view that the misfortunes of the lowly are not fit subjects for tragedy, he wrote sympathetically of the ludicrous experiences of a Tony Lumpkin, but he produced no *George Barnwell* of the country. He was an idyllic poet: his feeling was serious but not tragic; his indignation was tempered to something like gentle regret in the contemplation of that village of his memory and his imagination which possessed him, as he wrote, more completely than the village of his own day.

It is almost as difficult to get a fresh impression of the *Deserted Village* as of the Twenty-third Psalm. No one reads it; everyone knows it. And it is safe to guess that the majority of people if set to test their knowledge would pronounce it a descriptive poem and immediately fall a-quoting:

“Sweet was the sound, when oft at evening’s close,
Up yonder hill the village murmur rose;”

“The playful children just let loose from school;”

"A man he was to all the country dear,
And passing rich with forty pounds a year."

Here and there one might be found who would venture the lines:

"Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates and men decay,"

but in the main it is only the pictures of Auburn undeserted which have clung to the memory from childhood. This is only to say that Goldsmith was a master of pictorial and sentimental poetry, and to give to the more universal elements of his poem the credit due for their permanence and strength of appeal in comparison with the local and transitory. Yet it remains true that when the poem is read with a consideration for its wider social and historical significance, it acquires an additional value. Attain something of a sense of what the history of the English villager has been; realize his helpless surrender to a fate too strong for him to resist, and his smouldering, sullen, spiritless resentment of it; then read again the *Deserted Village*. Its picture of Sweet Auburn will remain the finest thing in the poem; but the pictures of the fate of Auburn's scattered cottagers will take on a new suggestiveness and the poem as a whole a new and richer meaning.

For the most part imaginative literature of Goldsmith's time had little to say directly to current village affairs. Villagers themselves were not writers, and Londoners were ignorant or indifferent: they either had settled ideas of their own as to country affairs, which they held to as Goldsmith's friends held to theirs, or their attention was elsewhere. Friends of villagers in the main advocated their cause before parliament instead of presenting it in literature. The age did not abound in great poets in any field, and no poet of note again employed the village theme until Crabbe's *Village* in 1783.

The spirit of revolt which animated Crabbe in the writing of the *Village* is as familiar as the poem itself. Pastoral pictures of happy valleys peopled by rustic swains piping to each other "in smooth alternate verse"

were for him the emptiest folly, and Goldsmith's ideal village and villagers were almost as far removed from that sordid truth which his early years in the mean little fishing village of Aldeburgh had taught him. In Aldeburgh the ugliness and poverty of a thin, sandy, weed-covered soil and the hardships of a sea-faring life had given the people a temper ungracious and unlovely, as different as possible from that of the kindly, pleasant folk of Auburn, or of the later Raveloe, or of the genial Dorset country-side of William Barnes. They were surly, sullen, joyless, suspicious, akin to the land they lived in, as were those wilder, more brutal people of the Brontë country to their barren and desolate Yorkshire moors. Such a sodden and frowning land and such a rough and repellant people furnished Crabbe with no parallel to anything he found in the accepted poetry of the country, and his own poetic impulse sought a natural outlet in the expression of the truth as he knew it.

The experience out of which Crabbe wrote the *Village* was narrow in comparison with Goldsmith's. He was untravelled even in England, and his village is no composite photograph, but a faithful representation of his own native place. Twenty-four years later, after a period of pleasant usefulness and an acquaintance with happier aspects of country living in other parts of rich and prosperous Suffolk, Crabbe wrote in somewhat different tone. Still stern and unflinching in the portrayal of poverty and hardship and sin, he at least admitted among his scenes more than the mere "gleams of transient mirth and hours of sweet repose" which he allowed his Villagers on their one brief day in seven. Gay he never could have been, even if he had been born in Auburn instead of Aldeburgh. Picture Crabbe tramping over Europe with a flute, piping for Dutch peasants and French villagers to dance! His grave nature fitted him for sympathy with peace and quiet content and a sober sort of pleasure, but not with rollicking, mirthful revelry; it fitted him for sympathy with hardship and suffering, and deepened by his own abundant share in such experiences became capable of profound searchings into the "pity and horror"

of the commonplace lives of the commonplace people whom he knew.

It is not individual Villagers who interest Crabbe in the *Village*. The figures in it are all typical. Nor is he concerned with any project of reform for the ills he describes, as is Ebenezer Elliott, depicting a similar situation some fifty years later. He makes no attempt to assign causes for what he sees, except the niggardliness of nature:

Her's is the fault, if here mankind complain
Of fruitless toil and labor spent in vain."

He cares only that this life which he knows in all the strength of its pitiful appeal shall have truthful representation. Because of its inherent pathos and tragedy, and because of the moral lesson it contains of the kinship of high and low,—if only the kinship of vice,—Crabbe finds the subject a worthy one.

His attitude is rare. Only in the work of a few of the greatest poets of the time,—Goldsmith, Burns, and in lesser degree Gray and Cowper,—does the common humanity of rich and poor press upon our attention. For smaller men, even those who write sympathetically and with some knowledge of fact, the gulf between lofty and humble is to be bridged only by condescension and patronage; the idea of a genuine brotherhood among men they rarely grasp. Unconsciously they betray an acceptance of that which for Burns, peasant born but more than a noble in the dignity and independence of his spirit, was the real sting of humble life, the rich man's insolent disregard of the humanity of the poor. That a man should be without land and wealth was nothing,—a thousand compensations were his; but that he should be looked upon as an inferior being was galling:

"I tent less, and want less
Their roomy fire-side;
But hanker and canker
To see their cursed pride." *

It stung Burns' soul to reflect upon luxury, which

* *Epistle to Davie.*

"eyes the simple rustic hind
 Whose toil upholds the glitt'ring show,
 A creature of another kind,
 Some coarser substance, unrefin'd,
 Plac'd for her lordly use thus far, thus vile, below." *

The equality which by virtue of his own "poet dignity" Burns asserted for himself, Crabbe would establish by burning in upon the minds of the upper classes the actual experiences of the poor, their struggles and defeats, their meager joys, bitter indignities, even their vices, where perhaps the kinship of man with man may be most directly established:

"Why make the poor as guilty as the Great?
 To show the great, those mightier sons of pride,
 How near in vice the lowest are allied;

So shall the man of power and pleasure see
 In his own slave as vile a wretch as he;
 In his luxurious lord the servant find
 His own low pleasures and degenerate mind."

There is nothing very enlivening or hopeful in such a community of spirit as this, but for Crabbe in 1783 no brighter view was possible, and in reality, whatever his avowed object, the truthfulness of his picture promised a new understanding that might well lead to a sympathy broader and more inspiriting than anything suggested in his own gloomy lines. The sympathy which Goldsmith aroused was no less sincere, but it was easier to win and to give. Crabbe taxed a less spontaneous and more generous spirit in his readers.

Though Crabbe makes no criticism of national policies or social systems, he portrays conditions that involve these things. The smuggling which is to a sea-faring village what poaching is to agricultural laborers, a way of escape from starvation or a means to otherwise unattainable possessions; the unspeakable conditions surrounding the poor in the abode of their last hopeless wretchedness—no wonder that the poor house was a spectre which haunted the peasantry, that over and over in the poems

* *A Winter Night.*

and stories of the village there is a shuddering abhorrence of its very name, "the House;" the misery of the poor old pauper on the rounds, given a grudging employment by the well-to-do and taunted even by the poor; the ignorance and quackery of the poor-house doctor, paid by the parish and protected in his murderous practice by an indifferent Bench; the shallow worldliness of the sporting young parson; the sternness of church-warden and overseer, and the overbearing pride of the farmer, begrudging the parson his tithes and the laborer his holiday; and finally the administration of justice at the hands of a man guilty of the crime he passes sentence upon,—these are things not chargeable to the niggard hand of Nature, but the product of the ignorance, unwisdom, inhumanity of man.

And while Crabbe does not fail to show all the inhabitants of his Village, from Squire to laborer, as sharers in mankind's common inheritance of evil, presenting the poor in their vices as impartially as in their sufferings, he inevitably creates the impression that there is small moral choice open to the poor. What beauty of character or comeliness of living is possible to them under a régime of hopeless poverty, in which all the forces of society conspire to keep them fixed? Even a man's native pride may work him harm; a slight youth, unequal to his task, but spirited and loth to yield, goes far beyond his strength, contending with "weakness, weariness, and shame;" his wife sees the danger, but she is cheerless and unwise,—she murmurs, he complains, and between them they only "urge the slow disease." And the old man, once the strongest and most skilled of all the rustic trade, who has outlived his comrades and his own strength and is dragging out a wretched old age in poverty and infirmity and neglect, puts the final seal of hopelessness upon existence in such a world. His children can not help him; they have their own cares,—

"and who
Feels his own want and succours others too?"

Poor little tasks grudgingly given him as a roundsman

passed from one reluctant employer to another by a system as heartless as it was short-sighted and disastrous, and death in the hated poor-house at last, are all that life holds for him. The solitude of the old man is the bitterest part of his lot:

"None need my help and none relieve my woe."

The combination of age with poverty and neglect and aching loneliness makes an almost unbearable picture. Goldsmith's sketch of the "poor widow'd solitary thing" who haunts the scenes of her vanished happiness in ruined Auburn, drearily living out the last remnant of her days alone, is of the same kind, but slighter and less poignant. The old pauper of the *Village* has the tragedy of a Lear.

Ainger may be right when he says, "it is no less good and right to dwell on village life as it might be than to reflect on what it has suffered from man's inhumanity to man." Certainly the world would be immeasurably poorer for the loss of its ideal pictures of village life. But at a time when in an unparalleled degree society was permitting and producing such suffering, when thousands of England's peasants were experiencing or living in dread of poverty and distress, the gloomy realism of Crabbe was to be preferred to something more gentle and pleasant.

To be of genuine value, however, the picture must of course be true. It must not merely substitute one set of misconceptions for another. And there is in the very darkness of Crabbe's picture, in its unbroken sombreness and gloom, occasion for suspicion. One feels that Goldsmith would have found even in the mean little Aldeburgh some human warmth and cheer, some confidence and good faith, some comradely association and enjoyment. Very probably the poem is too unrelieved for perfect truth. It was the product of the unhappiest period of Crabbe's life, when his own efforts promised to be as fruitless and his life as defeated as were those of his humble fellow villagers. There was no distance to lend a true proportion and no softening light of memory over characters and events which had for Crabbe's direct gaze

no possible mitigation. The *Monthly Review* (1783) expressed the doubt whether so utterly black a picture of the peasant's life was in reality a truer representation than the contrary extreme of uninterrupted pleasure and tranquillity. But for Crabbe's Aldeburgh it was, unhappily, much nearer than the "contrary extreme." And the Village was always Aldeburgh, it is to be remembered. The facts of the poem may not be the whole truth, but they are true.

Even when, as occasionally, Crabbe glances aside to those regions where different conditions prevail, where Nature is generous and Plenty smiles, still he finds a shadow over the land. Nature smiles only for few,—

"And those who taste not, yet behold her store,
Are as the slaves that dig the golden ore—
The wealth around them makes them doubly poor."

And as for the health that is commonly supposed to atone for the peasant's lack of wealth, Crabbe leaves little ground for a comforting belief in it. Cruel severity of toil, constant exposure, inadequate and unwholesome food do not insure soundness of body. The world needed Crabbe's rebuke for its pretended envy of the peasant's fare:

"Oh! trifle not with wants you can not feel,
Nor mock the misery of a stinted meal;
Homely, not wholesome, plain, not plenteous, such
As you who praise would never deign to touch."

And it needed whatever deepening of understanding and sympathy his penetrating and powerful study of one village could work for all village life, even that greatly more favored than his.

Neither Goldsmith nor Crabbe wrote as a propagandist. Goldsmith did indeed trace the evils which he deplored directly to their source in an extreme commercial spirit. But the public discredited his facts, disregarded his theory, and revelled in the idyllic beauty of Auburn undesolated. Crabbe painted what he saw, almost without comment. There is no evidence that his dark pictures aroused his readers to any sense of responsibility for

conditions, but they did excite the deepest feelings of compassion. His revolting description of the poor-house had very wide circulation and impressed itself strongly upon the imaginations of all sorts of readers. The comments of Sir Walter Scott and Wordsworth on this passage are well known. "We have known more than one of our acquaintances," said a writer in the *Edinburgh Review* (1807), "who declared they could never pass by a parish work-house without thinking of the description of it they had read at school in the 'Poetical Extracts.'"

The objection passed by John Scott of Amwell upon the poem is not to its truthfulness, which he fears is only too unquestionable,—and Scott's testimony on this point is valuable,—but to its attractiveness as poetry. Crabbe paints with a sombre pencil, too justly perhaps, but unpleasingly: "We know there is no unmixed happiness in any state of life, but one does not wish to be perpetually told so." It would seem that in Crabbe's day people were "told so" far from perpetually, and that his poem would offer no more than a moderate antidote to the prevailing notion of rural felicity. But Scott's criticism is expressive of his own attitude toward literature. Crabbe was impelled to write what life supplied him; those things which

"form the real Picture of the Poor,
Demand a song,—the Muse can give no more."

Scott felt no such compulsion, and his comment on Crabbe furnishes a fair key to his own poetic practice. He died in 1783, the year of the *Village*, and his work lies between Goldsmith's and Crabbe's. Though slight in intrinsic value, it bears an interesting relation to that of both men and to the developing body of literature devoted to village life.

Scott was born in London (1730), but from the age of ten years spent his life in the pleasant village usually coupled with his name, Amwell in Hertfordshire. He loved Amwell as Goldsmith loved Auburn, and his best known poem is in description of its charms and the historic interest of its environs. The first sketch of this

poem was shown to friends in 1761, but it was not published until 1776, when it appeared under the title *Amwell, a descriptive poem*. The poem shows evidences of Goldsmith's influence, though it was begun in affiliation with an earlier school. Thomson, Shenstone, and Dyer are the bards whose Muses Scott invokes.

The village that Scott describes is happy and prosperous, the country rich in the gifts of nature and in the pleasantness of successful toil. Amwell is described first as from a distance:

"So my pleased eye, . . .
On Amwell rests at last, its favourite scene!
How picturesque the view! where up the side
Of that steep bank, her roofs of russet thatch
Rise mix'd with trees, above whose swelling tops
Ascends the tall church tower, and loftier still
The hill's extended ridge."

So far, this is of the landscape, the *Grongar Hill*, type. But it passes on to dwell affectionately upon the people of Amwell, after the manner of the *Deserted Village*.

"By the road,
Where the neat ale-house stands (so once stood thine,
Deserted Auburn! in immortal song
Consign'd to fame) the cottage sire recounts
The praise he earn'd, when cross the field he drew
The straightest furrow, or neatest built the rick,
Or led the reaper band in sultry noons
With unabating strength, or won the prize
At many a crowded wake. Beside her door,
The cottage matron whirls her circling wheel,
And jocund chants her lay. . . .

The sportive troop
Of cottage children on the grassy waste
Mix in rude gambols, or the bounding ball
Circle from hand to hand, or rustic notes
Wake on their pipes of jointed reed: while near,
The careful shepherd's frequent falling strokes
Fix on the fallow lea his hurdled fold." *

It was not for lack of knowledge of harsher scenes and less happy lives that Scott wrote thus. He was a country

* *Amwell* was favorably received. A reviewer in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for July, 1776, declares that Scott "will in some degree compensate the loss of the bards of Auburn and the Leasowes."

gentleman, keenly conscious of his responsibility to the rural classes in his community. In 1773, after long reflection and wide inquiry, as his biographer affirms,* he published his *Observations on the present State of the vagrant and parochial Poor*. In this pamphlet he attacked the "brutal and indiscriminating harshness of the vagrant laws," denounced the practice of farming out work-houses, and advocated a general and uniform instead of a local and arbitrary tax. He traced the misery existing in villages to the greed of landholders who "enclose commons for the pasturage of horses, designed for exportation to our enemies, demolish cottages, and accumulate farms, adding house to house and field to field, till there be no place for the poor on earth." † Scott's pamphlet, though it leaves his own poetry high and dry, strikingly confirms both Goldsmith's description of a village deserted, and Crabbe's pictures of the poor, suffering doubly under a wretched system of "relief." Together with his biographer's comment it likewise confirms the wisdom of Goldsmith's neglected prediction of greater ills to fall upon England.

Scott's conviction of England's danger comes out in occasional poems. *Written in Harvest* describes a jovial harvest scene, but proceeds from this to a lament:

"Yet, Albion, blame not what thy crime demands,
While this sad truth, the blushing Muse betrays—
More frequent echoes o'er thy harvest lands
The voice of Riot than the voice of Praise."

* Chiswick collection, vol. 70, p. 14; R. A. Davenport, Esq.

† As his biographer, writing in 1822, notes, this pamphlet was written when the evil which excited it was only beginning to appear. "Had the author of the *Observations*," says Davenport, "lived till a later period, he would have seen cottagers, and little farmers, and yeomen, swept from the face of the land, and their destruction considered, by agricultural writers and political economists, as a sort of triumph, and a public benefit. . . . I am not yet convinced that an increase of produce is by this means obtained; but, were I convinced of it, I should still look upon their system as a monster of absurdity and cruelty. It is calculated to reduce the people to only two divisions—tyrants and slaves. . . . He who has the mind of a statesman will not attend merely to the quantity of food which is raised; but to the quality of intellectual energy, honest, courageous spirit, and domestic comfort which is to be found among the cultivators of the soil."

The way of escape which he suggests is in the cultivation of the "radiant virtues," fair Truth, sweet Peace, soft Charity, and Courage. So vague and conventional a remedy would never suggest Scott's real and practical interest in the country poor. *Recruiting*, a two stanza poem, should be read in connection with some of the dramatic pieces of the day to be best appreciated. It is a direct and plain protest against another sort of exploitation of the poor by Ambition.

"I hate that drum's discordant sound,
Parading round, and round, and round;
To thoughtless youths it pleasure yields,
And lures from cities and from fields,
To sell their liberty for charms
Of tawdry lace and glittering arms;
And, when Ambition's voice commands,
To march, and fight, and fall in foreign lands."

A "Moral Eclogue" of the typical conventional pastoral type, entitled *Armyn, or the Discontented*, reveals almost amusingly the fact that Scott the country gentleman was only casually connected with Scott the poet; one was a progressive, the other a conservative. The eclogue represents Albino, old and poor, as reproving the young and rich Armyn for a groundless, sentimental discontent. He himself has a genuine reason for sadness; he recalls fair scenes of his own earlier days,—

"pleasant village scenes
Of oaks whose wide arms stretch'd o'er daisied greens,
And windmill sails slow circling in the breeze,
And cottage walls enveloped half with trees"—

scenes of beauty and days of happy social hours.

"How changed, alas, how changed!—O'er all our plains
Proud Norval now in lonely grandeur reigns;
His wide-spread park a waste of verdure lies,
And his vast villa's glittering roofs arise."

Resignation is the doctrine Scott preaches. Albino concludes his reproof to Armyn thus:

"For me, hard fate!—But say, shall I complain?
 These limbs, yet active, life's support obtain.
 Let us, or good or evil as we share,
 That thankful prize, and this with patience bear."

Armyn is touched.

"My mind," said he, "its murmurs driven away,
 Feels Truth's full force, and bows to Reason's sway."

While this is very proper in Armyn, Albino's compliant resignation does not so readily approve itself to a twentieth century mind, which prefers the more positive virtues of ambition and self-assertion. It was, however, in perfect accord with the doctrine, social and literary, of Scott's day.

Scott's *Literary Apology* proclaims his conservatism as a poet. The muse of *Chevy Chase* had no charms for him; Virgil and Horace pleased his taste, and he coveted for his own songs nothing better than the praise given to Akenside and Shenstone. It was natural enough, therefore, that his progressive social views, which he forwarded in many practical ways, should have found only a qualified expression in his poems. In some purely literary matters, however, Scott may be classed among the precursors of the "romantic" movement in English literature. He used the sonnet and various stanza forms of some originality; he claimed with justice credit for bringing into English poetry much rural imagery new to the notice of poets. Altogether his work gathers up, with the significance often attaching to the production of a minor writer, many of the characteristics of his age.

A single poem of some note was written by Scott's friend John Langhorne, a clergyman appointed to the Commission of the Peace in 1772. He studied carefully the duties of his office and in response to the request of the great Justice Burn wrote in 1774, 1775, and 1776 the three parts of *The Country Justice*. The poem is a notable expression in poetry of those interests which Scott could express only in practical affairs, and a rather remarkable anticipation of Crabbe. Part I sketches the history of the Justice of the Peace and the character of a typical country

Justice, and pleads for firmness tempered by a due mindfulness of the temptation and need which draw men into sin. Vagrants, who have always been too harshly dealt with, find a special plea for clemency. Part II is the most striking of the poem, with its exhortation to the country Justice, the "king of the poor," to hear their complaints in person and not through a clerk, and its strictures upon that one monster demanding the utmost severity, the parish officer,—

"The sly, pilfering, cruel overseer;
The shuffling farmer, faithful to no trust,
Ruthless as rocks, insatiate as the dust."

Langhorne pictures the conditions of his day severely, but, he asserts, justly. The old age of hospitality, when the wealthy served as the natural patrons of the poor, is past. Now the needy and aged are referred to vestries; their cases are delayed, and while contending parishes quarrel over who shall care for them, they die. Langhorne summons Justice back from city enjoyments to the country. Part III decries the undue harshness of certain laws, as that against "female virtue lost." It is less clear and definite than earlier parts of the poem. Altogether *The Country Justice*, while it has not originality or high distinction as poetry, contains some striking and powerful passages, and is in a high degree significant of the humanitarian feeling which was breaking through the complacent and patronizing spirit of the upper classes toward their country poor.

The decade of *The Village* saw the democratic movement in English letters of which the poetry and the prose of the village is a part, enriched by the work of two other men of the highest eminence. Cowper's *Task* appeared in 1785, and the poems of Burns in 1786. Both poets wrote of humble people, as did Crabbe, from close personal knowledge, one as a friend and critic of village society, the other as a villager born.

One chief idea, or "tendency," as Cowper himself characterized it, runs through his loosely built poem. It celebrates the country and country life as most favorable

to the happiness and welfare of man, as "friendly to the cause of piety and virtue." Character can not be developed in the wild: it is the flower of social living,—but not of cities. "Retirement" found its most genuine apostle in Cowper, whose love for the country was one of his earliest emotions and whose desire for a country life one of his strongest impulses. There was no affectation or pretense in his preference. For seventeen years before he wrote the *Task* he had hardly been outside the little village of Olney, and however fancy may have colored his ideas of distant lands or of the active world of politics and statecraft, the country and the village he knew at first hand and intimately. The accuracy and the loving minuteness of his descriptions of nature, within the restricted field of his own experience, are proverbial, and strike one with new attractiveness on each rereading.

Cowper's reflective mind sometimes took on the color of the scene he dwelt upon with leisurely enjoyment, sometimes imparted its own mood to what he saw. So his portrayal of the peasantry of his village is colored by his current meditation. He knew all aspects of their lives, and seeing now the grave and now the gay, left record of both in his poetry. Their home lives and their activities in wood and field were familiar to him, and their figures were as inseparable a part of the landscape he loved to contemplate as were the trees and flowers and animals which made the joy of his daily walks. Perhaps it was owing to the gravity of his religious convictions and to his belief in a moral degeneracy in the life of his time,—certainly not to his natural temper when unclouded by a morbid melancholia,—that the total impression he leaves of the life of his own and neighboring villages is of its darker features. The man who really believes that

"The course of human things from good to ill,
From ill to worse, is fatal, never fails,"

is very likely to overstress the misfortunes, follies, and sins of men and to belittle their virtues and happinesses. Cowper was minutely accurate in his facts; he may be perhaps suspected of an unfairness of emphasis.

On the whole the peasant life he depicted is hard and forbidding and unlovely enough. He had no more illusions concerning the country than had the satirical Soame Jenyns fifty years before him. The happy days of rural innocence and refinement that poets celebrate he knew to be only airy dreams; in his own day even the dream was impossible. "The town has tinged the country;" increase of power has bred wealth, wealth luxury, luxury excess, and the taint has passed from the highest ranks to the lowest, from the chariot to the plough. The influence of gentry is too often withdrawn from the community where a natural claim demands its exercise, and the authority of magistrates is too often slothful or corrupt in its practice. The country girl, no longer by artless manners and neat attire close akin to the "fair shepherdess of old romance," now is an absurd imitation of a city belle, with ribbons, false hair, ruffles, French heels, train, and umbrella,—only her basket dangling on her arm betrays her real station. A parallel picture is that of the country youth drafted for military service, who has returned from his "three years of heroship" erect and martial and "smart as meal and larded locks can make him," ready to show by swearing, gaming, and drinking the great proficiency he has made abroad. When first he knew he was balloted, he trembled at the news, sheepishly doffed his hat and swore to be and do—he knew not what, whatever they pleased; now his simplicity is gone; to cut a swath in the society of his native village,—“to be a pest where he was useful once,”—this is all his aim and glory.

Cowper has nothing to suggest as substitute for the system of "universal soldiership" which works such harm as this. As to a still more pernicious evil, the riotous public houses of the country, he knows the hopelessness of any possible suggestion. Cowper's taverns have no hint of the simple, homely charm and comfortable invitation that we know in the ale-house of Auburn, or the Rainbow in George Eliot's Raveloe. They are like the beer-shop of Harriet Martineau's story *The Parish*, places where mischief is brewed, where discord and debauchery are nourished, and where all kinds of people

lose their hold upon decent and successful living. But so long as the excise is fattened on the spoils of such riot, it will continue:

"Drink, and be mad, then! 'tis your country bids! . . .
Her cause demands the assistance of your throats;—
Ye all can swallow, and she asks no more."

Nor does Cowper find much more cheer in the homes of the villagers. Poverty seems the inevitable state for them all, in some cases self-inflicted, the effect of laziness or waste or drunkenness, in others not to be avoided by the most careful thrift. His picture of the virtuous peasant's household on a winter night is as relentless as Crabbe's of the poor-house, though without the utter desolation of the latter, and in the main without its deliberately implied criticism of a wrong social system. The family is industrious, modest, quiet, neat; they claim compassion on this winter's night, when the toil that has warmed them during the day is over and they sit cowering vainly before the few embers left from their swiftly burned out blaze. Ill clad, ill fed, shivering in the half-darkness of a candle-less room, sleep is their only refuge:

"—for alas!
Where penury is felt the thought is chain'd,
And sweet colloquial pleasures are but few."

Their only boast is their independence, and their only comfort their mutual love. Their independence they barely sustain by a determined frugality in the face of an injustice which rewards the slatternly and importunate before the decent and self-respecting. The only hope, beyond the immediate aid of charitable friends, that Cowper can hold out to this virtuous and frugal pair is in the future of their children—a forlorn hope it seems when we remember Crabbe's old roundsman.

How, in the face of this situation, Cowper can justify his faith that poverty is in most instances the result of laziness and dissipation is a little hard to see, though the peculiar sordidness and meanness that belong to the poverty of the vicious, as distinguished from the decent

penury of the self-respecting, is easily recognized. Cowper does not sketch the home life of the good-for-nothing poor, but suggests what it must be by his recital of the thievish, drunken existence of the man who allows his family to pine neglected at home. Crabbe, in the *Village*, conveys unmistakably the impression that the vices of his rough, coarse villagers are due to the absence of softening influences in the lives they lead, and their poverty due to the niggardliness of nature and the injustice of men in power; Cowper recognizes primarily the force of individual moral responsibility and choice. Crabbe wrote out of an experience of overwhelming odds in external circumstances; Cowper out of an exaggerated moral consciousness and religious stimulation.

Yet Cowper is keenly sensitive to the heartiness and wholesomeness of country life. His waggoner, puffing along by his horses,

"With half-shut eyes, and pucker'd cheeks, and teeth
Presented bare against the storm,"

is a rude figure, but full of the wholesomeness of a healthy animal life. The woodman, going to his day of hard work in the solitary winter woods, marches in stolid unconcern, smoking steadily, heedless of the pranks of his dog whose scamperings in the powdery snow, loud barkings, and display of ivory teeth give an effect of vitality and cheer to the scene. A long, cold, laborious day is ahead, but man and dog together seem equal to it in both muscle and spirit. In the spring Cowper sometimes sees, in the remote places where he likes to wander, his solitude interrupted by a gay little scene, when the "playtime of the year" has called

"the unwonted villager abroad
With all her little ones, a sportive train,
To gather kingcups in the yellow mead,
And prink her hair with daisies, or to pick
A cheap but wholesome salad from the brook."

The country is indeed, for Cowper, the natural home of gaiety; that which passes by the name in the city is a mockery, so confessed by hollow eyes, blasphemous

speech, and broken fortunes. Gaiety belongs to innocence,—to the lark, and to the peasant, who, “himself a songster, is as gay as he.”

In contrast to this good cheer the pathos of poor Kate, crazed by the death of her sailor lover and wandering harmless over the countryside, makes a strong appeal; in accord with it is the peculiar charm of the village common with its rough but brilliant gorse and its freshly smelling turf, and the picturesqueness of the gipsy camp, abode of a vagabond and squalid tribe who yet have a rare health and gaiety of heart. All these varied and familiar aspects of village life Cowper presents in glimpses or in detailed description, faithfully and sympathetically.

Robert Burns can not be claimed as specifically a poet of the village. He was interested not in a restricted society of country people with the conditions that immediately determined their fortunes and manner of living, but in the more general and universal elements of peasant life and character,—“the sentiments and manners he felt and saw in himself and his rustic compeers around him.” * His peasantry appears in no defined relation to social and economic or political conditions: whatever setting they have is that of nature only. Yet no people was ever presented with a greater reality. Burns’ peculiar vantage point as one of them, together with the strong intelligence that revealed to him the significant and universal in them, and the genius which enabled him to portray it, made him the supreme poet of rustic life. It was his great good fortune that he could not, “with an eye to Theocritus or Virgil,” “look down for a rustic theme.” † His limitations from the point of view of a poet of all life were his opportunity as a poet of the Scottish peasantry. He was fortunate too in his affiliation with Scottish song writers rather than with the more artificial pastoral. Thomson, Shenstone, and Gray were all of some influence upon him, but his closer connection was with Ramsay and Fergusson and their kind, and with the folk ballad of Scotland, all of which served to asso-

* Preface to the First Edition of Burns’ Poems, 1786.

† Ibid.

ciate poetry with the stuff of his everyday life, and supplied him with a poetic medium perfectly adapted to his theme and to his lyric genius.

"I was bred to the plough, and am independent," said Burns in his Dedication of 1787, by implication attributing his own splendid pride to all his fellow peasants, whom he viewed without sentimentality or the possibility of patronage, and thought of without a shade of apology. He was not unaware of the injustices of society, of the oppression of poor by rich, and of the encroachment of greed and luxury upon the rural parts of Scotland. But no particular social evils engrossed his attention or distorted his view. When he mourns, it is not for the ills of a community suffering under a social maladjustment, but for the unescapable sorrow inherent in human life, or for some individual woe,—a remorse for the past or apprehension for the future in his own life, or the gentle, half pleasurable sorrow for an absent love or a pet yowe dead. There is no hint of poor-law or work-house; no enclosure act or sudden eviction; no bullying Justice, or quack doctor, or callous and worldly parson. There is plenty of "poortith cauld," but no resentment of it beyond the resentment of hurt pride for the abjectness into which the poor are sometimes forced by the contempt and selfishness of the rich. His own soul could never be so subdued, and it is only in an occasional moment of rebellion that he presents such subjection in other peasant folk. In the main they display a gay independence of poverty and a resourcefulness in it that robs it of its sting. Bess at her spinning wheel,* her simple wants supplied, enjoys the beautiful sights and sounds about her,—“the lintwhites in the hazel braes,” “the scented birk and hawthorne white,”—and feels no envy of rich or great. The two poets † jealously prize their independence and those joys of love and friendship which poverty can not take from them. And the poor in general, “delvers, ditchers, an’ sic cattle,” ‡ though they work constantly and when hard-

* *Bess and her Spinning Wheel.*

† *Epistle to Davie.*

‡ *The Twa Dogs.*

ship comes face the danger of starvation, are, as the ploughman's collie Luath assures his aristocratic friend Cæsar, "maistly wonderfu' contented."

"They're no sae wretched's ane wad think;
Tho' constantly on poortith's brink:
They're sae accustom'd wi' the sight,
The view o't gies them little fright."

If they are content with poverty, however, it is not from a lack of appreciation of the value of money. They have a shrewd enough worldly wisdom, which sometimes wins and is sometimes defeated in the contest with love. Meg o' the Mill prefers the gear of the good for nothing laird to the loyal heart of the strappin and ruddy miller; another maid says cynically that her lover does not suspect how well she knows that it is not herself but her "tocher" that he loves; * now and then a young wooer sings frankly, "Hey for a lass wi' a tocher!" But Tam Glen's true love bribes her counsellor Tittie to advise her to refuse the laird o' Drumeller and to marry Tam; the lassie whose father has bound her to marry the lad wi' the land has given her heart to the gallant weaver; † constantly, in song after song, the poor man is pitted against the rich and is usually shown to be the better man.

Nor is their content with poverty a mere stupid acceptance of a sordid existence, or pious resignation under oppression. These peasants of Burns are of an irrepressible vigor and vitality, and lead full and hearty and satisfying lives. There is a virility and whole-heartedness about their enjoyments that enables them to snap their fingers at the rich, who, curst "wi' want o' wark," pass insipid, dull, and tasteless days and give their nights to pitiful, unsatisfying attempts at pleasure.‡ They are on the whole rather sorry for the rich, who are—at least the country gentry—a good sort after all; except for an occasional little matter of the

* *My Tocher's the Jewel.*

† *The Gallant Weaver.*

‡ *The Twa Dogs.*

“shootin o’ a hare or wood-cock,
The ne’er a bit they’re ill to poor folk.”

As for themselves, they enjoy their “blink o’ rest” the more for their hard labor; they take comfort in their evenings with their wives and children about their fire-sides; a mere

“twal pennie worth o’ nappie
Can mak the bodies unco happy”;

and they have the unfailing resource of laying aside their own private cares

“To mind the Kirk and state affairs,”

to “ferlie at the folk in Lun’on,” and to stir up in themselves a satisfying fury against taxation, patronage, and priests. Then they have their festal occasions, when all rural life unites in merry-making and

“social Mirth
Forgets there’s Care upon the Earth.”

At Hallowmas all the superstition that lurks in the mind of the peasant is awake and stirring, and loud merriment and boisterous practical jokes take turns with the no less pleasurable thrills at half longed for, half dreaded, apparitions and ghostly portents and foretellings. New Year furnishes a scene of indoor jollification which is the very embodiment of household cheer and neighborly conviviality.

The wholesome simplicity and virtue of their everyday lives appears rather self-consciously in *The Cottar’s Saturday Night*, but just as really and more convincingly in such a poem as *The Twa Dogs*, or *The Auld Farmer’s New Year Salutation to his Auld Mare Maggie*. As the old farmer looks at his mare, once so fleet and strong, now “dowie, stiff, and crazy,” he lives over their nine-and-twenty years together: their first youthful strength and fire; the good work they have done,—

“Aft thee an’ I, in aught hours gaun
On guid March weather,
Hae turn’d sax rood beside our han’,
For days thegither”;

the storms they have weathered,—

“Monie a sair daurk we twa hae wrought,
 An’ wi’ the weary warl’ fought!
 An’ monie an anxious day, I thought
 We wad be beat!
 Yet here to crazy age we’re brought,
 Wi’ something yet.”

So sturdy, loyal, and undaunted a spirit as this is assuredly, no less than the household virtues of the Cottar, one source from which “old Scotia’s grandeur springs.”

Altogether they are a heartening folk to know, these peasants of Burns, thoroughly human and likeable, from the country lass with her coquetry, her sly jibes at her rival, and her final acceptance of her “braw wooer” to save him from a sad death, to the glorious old reprobate, Tam o’ Shanter; from the patriarchal Cottar to the ribald and riotous Jolly Beggars. They are by no means too good to be true: they drink heavily, royally, “divinely”; they are lured by the witchery of beauty and love beyond the bounds of decorous virtue; they grow sharp tongued and malicious in their differences of religious opinion and allegiance; they are sometimes canny to the point of unloveliness. But they exhibit also the sturdy independence, the sincere religion, the pride and honorable self-respect and the hearty readiness for whatever life may bring, toil and hardship as well as pleasure, that we have come to associate with the Scottish peasantry. Much in Burns is peculiarly of Scotland: the rough, homely, beloved Scottish speech; the stern bleakness of the land obtruding upon its milder aspects, the echo of its westlin winds and its brattle o’ winter war; the warlocks and witches, spells and charms native to the highlands; Scotch parritch and haggis and usquebaugh; the Scot’s particular kindling of the spirit toward religious doctrine and dispute. Yet beneath what is distinctively Scottish is the universal, and the rustics of Burns draw from the common inheritance of all rustics. From the very fact that Burns’ impulse to song was personal and æsthetic, not social or political, the picture he left us is the more complete and

true. It is impossible to overestimate the strength of his influence in the development of a literature of humble life. In this regard his poetry parallels a whole movement like that of ballad literature, or a social event like that of enclosure, without the latter's promotion of a didactic or propagandist spirit.

It is impossible now to recover much of the minor poetry which made its way into print during the decades that we have been considering. Poetically the loss is probably only gain, but on the score of its historical interest we may feel a mild regret at its disappearance. Stray volumes of verse and collections of fugitive poetry have preserved enough of these poems to afford evidence of the kind of interest and of literary treatment which the countryman and his affairs were commanding from writers.

In *Bell's Classical Arrangement of Fugitive Poetry*, 1789, Volume IX is entitled *Elegies Local, Sympathetic, and Funereal*. The title allies the poems of the volume with the pastoral tradition, which they follow closely, some of them in a particularly slavish imitation of Gray. The poor, both of city and country, are the subject of lament. *The Beggar*,* a poem well known to an earlier American generation from its appearance in a school "reader,"—the first line will recall it to anyone who droned it out from the school benches: "Pity the sorrows of a poor old man!"—presents an appeal for charity in behalf of a countryman who has suffered misfortune. His experience is precisely that sketched by Goldsmith as the lot of the villagers driven out of Auburn, and that known from historical studies to have befallen countless villagers throughout England. His small farm has been lost, his family evicted from their cottage, his daughter ruined, and his wife brought to her death by the sufferings thus brought upon her.

The Poor Man's Prayer† is akin to this, but more definite and particular. It is a direct plea to Chatham to stop the exportation of corn which the Poor Man holds

* Anonymous.

† By the Rev. Dr. Roberts, of Eton.

accountable for his own penury and distress. He recounts his experience: he recalls those days when the peasant's life was blest, when he himself with his family about him enjoyed in security the delights of home in his small cottage; now cold and famine have destroyed that peace, and even the shelter of his roof is soon to be denied him; nature is no less richly productive than before,—shall he, after a laborious and temperate life, “in the midst of plenty pine away,” that trade may flourish and rich men grow richer?

Real, dramatic, and pitiful as the experiences glanced at in these poems was in actual fact, no such presentation as this, impersonal, vague, and conventional, can give them much appeal to our sympathies. It is surprising that after Goldsmith, even after Crabbe and Cowper and Burns, men could go on droning along in the same old way. A large part of it is, of course, to be attributed to mere lack of poetic gift. Except for a line here and there of real discernment and power,—such as this plain and bare but curiously poignant line from *The Beggar*,

“For I am poor and miserably old,” —

these poems proceed upon a dead level of monotony. And the moral attitude shows the same bondage to custom. Charity for the sufferer, not relief of the causes of his suffering, is all that the poet contemplates (the *Poor Man's Prayer* is an exception); resignation to the will of Heaven is the poor man's part. The Beggar, in the tone of Scott's Albino, says:

“Heaven sends misfortunes—why should we repine?
 'Tis Heaven has brought me to the state you see:
 And your condition may be soon like mine
 The child of sorrow—and of misery.”

An Elegy, by the Rev. John Delap, D. D.,* has a spirit almost of congratulation for men who enjoy the blessings of poverty and humble toil. The poem has a particular interest in the fact that this village is one of miners, whose presence in the straight and narrow path of the classic

* *Bell's Classical Arrangement of Fugitive Poetry*, Vol. VIII, p. 52.

pastoral is new and strange. But the Rev. Mr. Delap's picture of them is old enough, as are his moral lessons drawn from their lives. The poet is unable to sleep in the early morning; in spite of his blandishments and his appeals "she flies, the partial nurse of nature flies," and the poet betakes himself without, to watch "the slumbers of the drowsy east." He sees the miners going to their toil with sturdy step and cheery whistle, and is divided between commiseration of their banishment to the "murky mansions of central night," and pleasure in their security, since

"the storms that strike the land
With wild dismay roll harmless o'er their head."

The voice of mirth is loud and jovial among them as they labor; their homes are happy, their hearths glow with the social blaze and their tables are spread

"with such coarse fare
As fits the genius of their little fate."

They enjoy also all those spiritual blessings that come from ignorance and unsophistication:

"No stains their mind from worldly science bears:
Their ray of knowledge gleams from nature's page."

The proud sage whose "deep mysterious brain" has reasoned away all his hope may well envy their happier lot. This current view, only half sincere and wholly shallow, of the life of humble people, is epitomized in one line of Delap's poem:

"To be unhappy we must first be great."

In contrast with this, it is refreshing to come upon an occasional bit of homely realism, with a clearer appreciation—or a franker statement—of the poor man's attitude toward life. Much earlier than this, some twelve years before the *Deserted Village*, indeed, such a poem appeared in *The Contented Clown, a Tale*, published in a volume of 1757, entitled *The Muse in a Moral Humour*. The attraction of this particular poem lies in the fact that the

Muse was *not* in a moral humor. The Clown is contented, to be sure, but apparently because he is lucky enough to have been born with an easy-going, happy temper, and because he accepts his fate in life with a simple philosophy much more natural to the peasant than a religious resignation. He is wretchedly poor, his home is sordid and mean, his life is laborious, and yet he is unfailingly merry. A neighboring Squire, envying his good spirits, asks their cause. Hodge explains: he does occasionally utter a secret curse or two when he looks upon the coaches and horses and servants of the rich and knows that he will never in all his life be worth a groat;

“But when I change the Case, and think how few
Have such Estates, and live like one of *you*;
And yet how many Millions have the Curse
Of my Condition, if not still a worse;
Content, that Work I follow I began,
And still jog on as merry as I can.”

This reflection is hardly satisfying to the philosophic mind, but fits into the habit of thought of a Hodge, who is disposed to regard the circumstances of his own life as a part of the order of nature, to be accepted with stolidity, if not with positive jollity.

But apart from the matter of Hodge's contentment, the poem is worth attention for its striking picture of the life of a cottager, a day laborer, under the old economy. Poor as he was, Hodge was no pauper. The Squire noted of him that he

“still was merry, and was still content,
And though his Charge increas'd—still paid his Rent.”

The explanation of his small independence lay in his possession of a few pieces of stock and the right of common for them; of his wretchedness the explanation was in part his landlord's greed and in part his own and his wife's unthrift. The picture gives some color to the contention of certain advocates of enclosure that the common system provided independence at the cost of decency, in supplying only enough to maintain life on the lowest standards. Yet even for such cottagers as are

correctly pictured in this poem, it is hard to find any boon in a complete dependence upon money wages with work given or withheld at the need or pleasure of employers, and, wages failing, poor-rates and work-house the final resource.

The picture, unlovely as it is, is worth quoting in some fullness.

“Young Hodge, a poor, but a contented Swain,
Rented a homely Cottage on a Plain;
Homely you’d say, if you the Cottage saw,
The Walls were rear’d of Mud, and thatch’d with Straw: . . .
Well with the Place the Furniture agreed;
No Implements of Luxury, but Need: . . .
All that you could unnecessary call,
Were some old tatter’d Ballads on the Wall:
‘Alike of Wealth was all his Stock and Store,
Two Bee-Hives (one forsaken) at the Door,
And Cabbages and Turnips half a Score:
A meagre Tit that on the Common graz’d,
A small Runt Cow that from a Calf he rais’d;
One Cock, two Hens, and half a Dozen Chicks,
Two little Heaps of Hay, which *Hodge* call’d Ricks:
Three Pigs, within Doors kept, and serv’d with Care;
To these—a Wife—two Girls—a son and Heir:
These were his Stock—nor did he e’er repine,
Tho’ Pigs, Wife, Children, often did combine
To greet his Ears, and in loud Concert join.
But midst this Scene of Poverty and Woes,
Hodge, by his Looks, no Discontentment shows; . . .
At Work he whistles; when his Work is done,
No more is tir’d than when he first begun;
Homeward he hies, and tunes a merry Song,
His lov’d, tho’ dirty squawling Tribe among. . . .
Such *Hodge*’s Life was, which a neighb’ring Squire
Did often with an envious Mind admire.”

Was it such a neighboring Squire who wrote the poem, or some observant and sympathetic parson, or some Soame Jenyns carrying his observation from the country gentry to country laborers?

The same speculation is excited by another poem in this collection, equally homely, equally particular in its detail, and equally close to the experience of country folk. *Snaith Marsh, a Yorkshire Pastoral*, portrays a youth more thrifty but not more fortunate than the Contented

Clown. Robin, like hundreds of other young English rustics, had worked and saved in the hope of accumulating sufficient gear to set up in life for himself. He had bought his stock, investing all his savings, had rented a cottage to secure rights on the common, and was ready to begin life with his bonny Susan, when one of those strange interferences of fate contrived by public-spirited statesmen in distant London brought him to disaster. *Snaith Marsh*, "the whole Town's pride, the poor Man's Bread," was enclosed, and he was undone. Susan proved false and deserted him for landed Roger. The banns have already been called, Robin's plea to Susan to go with him to some distant parish, still unenclosed, is too late,—he is "ev'ry way o' the losing hand,"—

"And all these Sorrows came, syne *Snaith Marsh* was no more." *

Fortunately for the student of literature a strong human interest often redeems the poorest poetry from utter deadliness. The concreteness and the faithfulness of the picture in *Snaith Marsh* is in happy contrast, for instance, to the dreary waste of generalities and obscurities in such a poem as Beattie's *Triumph of Melancholy*, in which amid all the vague allusions to Care and Doubt, Pain and Fear, images of Woe, pale Sickness' gloomy bed, etc., one brief interval of comparative definiteness occurs, in a reference to events similar to those we have been contemplating:

"For ah! thy reign, Oppression, is not past;
Who from the shivering limbs the vestment rends?
Who lays the once rejoicing village waste,
Bursting the ties of lovers and of friends?"

The greater elegance of Beattie would win for him from his contemporaries a recognition impossible to the unknown poet of *Snaith Marsh*. But the honesty of tone in the latter combines with its human interest to make it for the modern reader immeasurably more readable.

* The inaccessibility of this poem, and its historical value, justify the reprinting of it. See Appendix.

One other poem in this same volume should be noticed for its combination of thoroughly realistic rustic material with a traditional literary treatment. It is *Robin, a Pastoral Elegy*, by Capt. John Dobson, and touches upon the theme of soldiering, which figured largely in the village life of the 18th century and appears frequently in literary presentations of the village. Robin's sweetheart has been stolen away by a soldier who captured her heart with

"His Dowlas ruffles and his Copper Lace,
His Brick-dust Stockings, and his brazen Face."

The poem is much more overlaid by convention than the two just noticed. Robin's hair is properly matted and his cheeks all pale, and he invokes hills and groves, woods and streams to echo his complaint; he catches a glimpse of himself in the brook as he kneels to slake his thirst (for "Sorrow's dry," he says, as did Gaffer Treadwell in Gay's Thursday elegy), and is shocked to see "how frightful pale" he looks. All this is of the elegy, elegiac; but his reminiscences of his earlier happy days when he shared Susan's toil, plucked ripe peaches for her from his Worship's garden,—“and you eat them all,” he not too gallantly reminds her,—when he took her to the fair and loaded her with fairings, this is of the ballad in all but form. The poem as a whole supplies another instance of democratic feeling and an inclination toward realism, together with a bondage to an aristocratic form and manner.

A publication of 1770 called *Analects in Verse and Prose*,* only less interesting than the *Muse in a Moral Humour*, contains a number of diverting poems by “unknown hands.” *The Fatal Incident*, a ballad, also dealing with the fortunes of a military man, has an irresistible absurdity. Aladin is returning from a protracted absence of six months on military duty, and hastens to see his Emina. He has not had one single line from her for fourteen days,—a disquieting silence which causes him

* *Analects in Verse and Prose. Chiefly Dramatical, Satirical, and Pastoral.* 2 vols. London. Printed for John Dodsley, MDCLXX.

some apprehension as to her good faith. He utters very unpatriotic maledictions on the powers responsible for his military service:

“Plague on the man, be he who will,
That first the wars began,
But may he be more plagued still,
That schem’d the militia plan.”

Why he, a virtuous man, has been chosen instead of various rascals whom he names, is a puzzle to him. Hurrying on to his Emina he takes a short cut through the church-yard, where his happy reflections on the day when he and Emina will visit the church together are cut short by a sudden arresting sight,—and the tragedy of the poem is upon us and past us before we have time to prepare for its shock.

“Ah me! what name’s on yonder stone,
That meets my tortur’d sight!
'Tis Emina’s! 'tis her’s alone!—
Then to the world, good night.”

Three more stanzas and his end is come:

“Alas! I feel my blood retire,
My eyes grow dim apace,
The fates have heard my last desire,
We’ll in the grave embrace.”

In the nature of things the final catastrophe has to go unrecorded, but no sympathetic reader can question the speedy demise of this close kinsman of that “Man of Feeling” who died in Mackenzie’s pages a year later.

The Death of Lord Eglington, in the manner of Chevy Chase,* though often quite outrageous poetry, is of decided interest as representing literary and social tendencies. The poem recounts the death of Lord Eglington at the hands of a poacher, after a long interchange of accusation and self-defense, reproach and defiance. It is a lord of old romance, a model of gallantry and manly grace, who sets out upon the hunt on a fine autumn morning, but the

* *Analects in Verse and Prose. Chiefly Dramatical, Satirical, and Pastoral.* 2 Vols. London. Printed for John Dodsley, MDCLXX.

man who brings him low is an eighteenth century English peasant. When the lord comes upon the poacher at his unlawful business the latter stands his ground and presents his case with spirit and with a just appreciation of the real principles involved. Chance has given to Lord Eglington the ownership of these woods and vales, but this fact is no warrant for cruel and inhuman treatment of poverty: Lord Eglington does not need what the poacher's gun brings down, and what to the poacher's family is rescue from starvation. The poor man declares plainly that in the face of the relief thus secured he feels no sorrow at the breaking of the game law, itself to his mind a violation of nature's plan. When Lord Eglington, proof against the poacher's plea, and irritated by his reproaches, repeats his demand that the poacher resign his gun, the latter again refuses; he will leave this land and seek the wilderness where he may find a living denied him in these richer vales.

“There spight of thee, thou haughty peer!
I'll drink tranquility;
Nor shall I live again in fear
Of such a thing as thee.”

Lord Eglington's response to this is a blow, and the poacher in sudden passionate rage raises his gun and kills the lord. At once Lord Eglington becomes an affecting object, sinking upon the ground and sighing out a long farewell to his Corina. The poacher is aghast with horror at his own deed, and pours forth his remorse with prayers for the life of the man whom now he calls—on no good ground—“dear hasty youth.” Lord Eglington begs that he be borne to his Corina's side:

“Do this! be all thy sins forgiv'n,
Altho' by thee I bleed,
Do this! and may all-judging heav'n,
O'erlook thy bloody deed.”

Forgetting the lord's own sins that cry out for forgiveness, and the fact that it is a mere chance that the lord and not he himself is dying, the poacher continues his lamentations and his prayers,—

"For O his goodness wounds me more
Than cou'd his keenest sword."

Opportunely Corina is seen approaching, brought, presumably, by some telepathic summons, since there has been no previous hint of her presence in the vicinity. The poacher utters a despairing farewell to his wife and babies, whom he knows he never shall see again and who will be left helpless without him, and the poem concludes with the death of Lord Eglington in the arms of Corina.

The absurdity of this performance is manifest even in this sketch. Yet as one comes upon it tucked away in a volume of obscure and forgotten verse it strikes one less by its absurdity than by its individuality. There is initiative in its recognition of the dramatic possibilities of a poacher's story, and of the fitness of the ballad form to embody such a story, with its combination of woodland scenes, gay trappings, and tragic event. Sentimentalism and a conventional type of morality it has, but it is free from patronage. The peasant is not even by implication told to be resigned to the lot heaven has ordained for him: on the contrary his lot is made to seem the result of man's cruelty. Poaching might well be condoned,—Lord Eglington appears despicable in his refusal to condone it; it is only by the breaking of a fundamental law of right that the poacher brings condemnation upon himself. And even here the poet's attempt to transfer his own and the reader's sympathy to Lord Eglington is perfunctory and unsuccessful. He grows sentimental where before he has been, however crude, at least sincere. He can not reconcile his own lively interest in the poacher's hard fate with the demands of art that require him to make the man of high degree his hero. The poem is thoroughly interesting as one of the earliest protests made in imaginative literature against the fundamental injustice and the particular hardships of the English game law.

Further evidence of this turning to contemporary conditions is furnished by the dramatic entertainments dealing with village life of which something was said in the preceding chapter. The village appeared as setting, or furnished characters or (more rarely) action, in stage

pieces from an early date in the century. By the '60s., the decade of Goldsmith's marked interest in village life, such plays had become distinctly fashionable, and in this decade some eight or ten of them appeared. These were like the earlier plays in many respects, and on the whole probably served to perpetuate a false notion of the country as an Arcadia or an imaginary world of comedy, yet they have gleams of realism which indicate a response to conditions in actual life. *The Village Wedding, or The Faithful Country Maid*,* for example, is called a "pastoral entertainment of music"; it contains but three characters and the words serve as a mere vehicle to the music. Nothing could be farther from actual village people and experiences. George Saville Carey's two "operas," published in *Analects in Verse and Prose*, 1770, are weak productions, combinations of impossible situations and actions, with disguises, pretended use of magic, and all the tricks of highly conventionalized romance. Yet *The Cottagers* has a Country Squire whose stubborn resistance to his daughter's wish to marry a humble shepherd makes him a sort of replica of Squire Western; and *The Nut Brown Maid* has two quite delightfully real people in a Country Justice and his jealous wife.

The Cottagers, by R. J. Goodenough,† is rural in setting, with shepherds, haymakers, and peasants listed among its characters. Hearty, Nanny's father, favors her marriage to the young farmer William, whom she loves, but the Dame, a poorly done Mrs. Malaprop, has social ambitions, and approves the suit of "Sir Charles," an imposter. At the wedding festival, planned by Hearty for Nanny and William, and perverted by the Dame into one for Nanny and Sir Charles, the latter's fraudulence is revealed, and the wedding takes place according to Hearty's original schedule and is properly celebrated by a chorus of rustics. In outline the little play seems a product only of literary convention, but various details mark its author's observation of current affairs. "The

* James Dance Love, London, 1767.

† Published in 1779, but acted some ten or twelve years earlier; published in a second edition under the title *William and Nanny*.

town has tinged the country," said Cowper a few years later. Goldsmith glanced with delightful satire at one instance of this in his picture of the two elegant city ladies surrounded by the admiring Primrose family. Students of the time have especially noted the influence of city bred servants upon the ideas and ambitions of country people who came to know them. In *The Cottagers* Nanny says that her mother has formed strange affected notions of high life from her acquaintance with Lady Racket's housekeeper. The Dame thinks that domestic service is suggested for Nanny, and at once bridles; she could never approve of her daughter's going out to service: "thof so be as we be call'd farmers, we're as good gentlefolks as anybody—service may do well enough for a poor curate's daughter and such, but not for a daughter of mine." The whole is intended to preach simplicity to a London audience; the last song concludes:

"Those foolish parades which your grandeur affords,
They leave with disdain to fine ladies and lords."

How seriously Goodenough took his own little play is evident from his Preface, in which he answers certain adverse criticisms: "in these days of luxury and dissipation, when 'the toe of the peasant galls the courtier's kibe,' the play may afford no unprofitable lesson, in the defeat of the wife's pride and vanity by her husband's rectitude and his plain, blunt, and honest good humour."

Isaac Bickerstaff has three plays within this decade. *Love in a Village* (1762)* shows really a city plot and city people in the country; two young people, destined by their fathers for each other, run away from home, meet in the country and promptly fall in love with each other, in the disguise of gardener and chamber-maid. Two other pairs of lovers, one pair rustics, complicate the plot. The village element enters only in the background, but is rather interesting. One scene † has a "hiring fair" held

* "Partly compiled from works of Charles Johnson, Wycherley, and Marivaux." Charles Johnson's *The Village Opera* had been played unsuccessfully at Drury Lane in 1728.

† Act I, scene iv.

on a village green, with servants standing around waiting to be hired; there is dancing, and some pretty good rustic conversation, in which is introduced the motive of enlisting. "Are you willing to serve the King?" "Why, can you list ma? Serve the King, Master, no, no, I pay the King, that's enough for me."

The Maid of the Mill (1765), is founded on *Pamela*, with some scenes perhaps taken from a Spanish opera. Here also there are three pairs of lovers, much complication of plot and many disguisings, with some good drawing of rustic character. Giles, the aspirant to the hand of Patty, who, like Pamela, has been brought up above her station, is a farmer of sturdy character but uncouth manner. Patty's father, the Miller, favors his suit: Giles is "not a gentleman; but what are the greatest part of our country gentlemen good for?" he demands. Of Patty's brother Ralph his sweetheart in a fit of anger says: "he has a heart as hard as any parish officer,"—as though that were proverbially hard.

The Recruiting Sergeant (1769), a "Musical Entertainment," is thoroughly realistic throughout; the talk is that of real country people, and the dialogue is as natural as possible in verse. The Dramatis Personæ include only Sergeant, Countryman, Wife, and Mother. The scene is "a country place," a village, with bridge in foreground, ale-house on one side and cottage on the other. The Sergeant and his company come over the bridge, the country people out of the cottage. The Sergeant tries to persuade the Countryman to enlist; he assures him it is a jolly life, and describes a battle as a "charming thing." The Countryman is at first greatly taken by the idea, but then reflects upon the danger to his own head; his mother maintains in 18th century terms that she "didn't raise her boy to be a soldier" and entreats him not to go; his wife begs him in the name of his children to stay at home, and the Sergeant's description of the battle, made just a shade too picturesque, finally decides him to do so. The last scene shows dancing of light-horse-men, recruits, and country girls. They all drink a health to the King and Queen and their children, and success to his Majesty's

arms. The play is undoubtedly indebted to Farquar's *Recruiting Officer*.

The theme of the soldier or sailor, off fighting his country's wars, saying farewell to wife or sweetheart, returning to find his fortune made or lost, or just being enticed into going, is a favorite one in dramatic presentations, as in poetry, of the time, and in the prose novels of a little earlier day. Bickerstaff's *Thomas and Sally, or The Sailor's Return* (1782) brings Thomas home just in time to save Sally from the machinations of an evil-minded old Squire. Charles Dibdin's *The Deserter* (1782) has an amusing character in Skirmish, a soldier in prison, who talks about war; he feels that no proper display of its glories has been made to the villagers: "When the King goes to the camp, then's the time—the drums beat—the fifes play—the colours are flying—and—and—Lord—Lord! what a charming thing war is!" So it is presented also in Dibdin's *Lord of the Manor*.^{*} Sergeant Sash announces: "I am a manufacturer of glory, a recruiting sergeant, come here to raise aspiring heroes from the cart whip to the musket, from the plough-tail to the parade of honour!" Ralph, the usual gullible, rough sort, vain and susceptible to flattery, asks if he will become a general. The Sergeant roundly assures him he will, "as soon as ever he will become a captain or a corporal," and the poor youth is satisfied, especially when the Sergeant presents him with "the king's picture framed in gold," a guinea. It is the red coat, the "swash," and the "sword by my side," that appeal to Ralph.[†] It is significant that when the Sergeant presents his men, the Justice expresses the hope that none but honorable means have been resorted to in raising the recruits. Of course Sergeant Sash readily reassures him on that score.

The Lord of the Manor touches satirically upon other matters also. Young Constant, son of the new purchaser of the manor, is a coxcomb and a cad, embodiment of the

^{*} Printed in 1812; originally acted in 1781. Some marks of the late date of printing appear in references to French affairs.

[†] Compare Scott's poem *Recruiting*, and Cowper's sketch of the enlisted countryman in *The Task*.

affectation and extravagance of the new class of country gentry, unused to their wealth and their social position and attempting to establish themselves by a vulgar display. Of course the foppery of Constant is exaggerated for mere comic effect, but the satirical purpose of the play is plain. Young Constant had a whole hunting equipage with new liveries, not "rough buckskin and homespun, fit only to leap hedges and ditches in, but such as might grace a modern melodrame." "Thanks to my fellow sportsmen in the senate," said he, "we have as good a system of game laws as can be found in the most gentlemanlike country on the continent." Of course Constant was implacable in the matter of poaching. "From a pheasant to a rabbit, chasse defendue—no pardon for poaching," is his dictum. Constant wishes to get rid of a certain obstacle to his pleasure, the son of a curate. His serving man suggests a press gang. "Transcendant! if one could be found. Were the game laws and the press act properly enforced, the constitution might be more tolerable for a man of fashion; but if the plaguey liberality of our laws keeps substituting freedom for feudal rights we dashing fellows must begin to study propriety to prevent our sinking into insignificance." Meanwhile, "the father to gaol, the lover to sea, and the girl in my arms," is his program.

Plays relating to village life go on well into the next century much after the model of those already sketched. On the whole they show less freedom from traditional forms and ideas than much other village literature, but they do not escape altogether, evidently, the pressure of current affairs upon public attention. They are romantic, as in Mrs. Brooke's *Rosina* (1783), taken from a French opera, "the subject of which, as well as the beautiful episode in Thomson's *Autumn*, has been furnished by the sacred writings,"—that is, the story of Ruth; or in *The Village Maid*, an opera in three acts, by a Young Lady, who in her Preface apologizes for "numerous errors" in the piece and expresses the hope that "the confined scale of a female's education will in some measure soften the criticisms of a minute perusal." Or they are farcical, as

The Cooper (Arne), *The World in a Village* (O'Keeffe), and *The Farmer's Wife* (Charles Dibdin, Jun.), in most of which rascality is attributed to country and city folk alike and the game is to see who can win in a contest of unscrupulous wits. These plays assuredly can not be accused of propagandist purpose, but they do make a certain contribution directly from life to the store of literary inheritance.

Long before the end of the century, however, the village had attained such vogue in literature, that it was taken over for didactic and propagandist purposes in productions which often lie outside the province of literature proper. Hannah More's *Village Politics*, for example, a series of dialogues, published in 1792, drew forth from her friend and admirer, Horace Walpole, a most enthusiastic letter of praise, as being "infinitely superior to anything on the subject, clearer, better stated, and comprehending the whole mass of matter in the shortest compass."* The subject was the ideas of the French Revolution, which were being discussed very generally through the villages of England and inspiring notions of Freedom and of dissatisfaction with English institutions that caused some anxiety among observers such as Horace Walpole and Hannah More and the writers of the *Anti-Jacobin* five years later.

Meanwhile the more purely literary tradition was being continued by many writers. Poems appeared shortly after *The Deserted Village* dedicated to Goldsmith, and evidently in imitation of his work, or in contradiction of his picture there given. And in the last years of the century appeared Samuel Rogers' *Pleasures of Memory*, a poem which is often linked by later writers with Goldsmith's. The first hundred and fifty lines or so of the second part are the basis of this comparison, being a "description of an obscure village, and of the pleasing melancholy which it excites on being revisited after a long absence." The lines are pleasant but of no novelty or distinction. James Grahame, author of *The Sabbath*,

* Forty years later Ebenezer Elliott pleased various people better by calling her "the incarnation of a clap-trap."

published in 1797 his *Rural Calendar*, which, though primarily a poem of inanimate nature, gives some interesting pictures of the village. It speaks, for example, of the old time self-sufficiency of cottage life in the village, with its ideal of "frugal fare, served by the unhired hand," mentions Goldsmith's notion of the "splendid" as compared with the "happy" state, and remarks upon the razing of cottages to afford a vista for a lord's park, as quite a familiar event in country life.*

In 1788 appeared *The Village Curate*, and in 1800 *The Favourite Village*, by Cowper's friend the Rev. James Hurdis. The former describes the Curate's year, with the varied pleasures of its changing seasons. The Curate describes the work of farmer and smith,—he loves to see "how hardly some their frugal morsel earn," it gives his own a zest! The smith, who earns at best a scanty subsistence in this pinching world, often at the expense of health, points for Hurdis this moral: do not pursue wealth or ease, but consider the poor and be content, as they are. The ornate and pompous verse of this Oxford Professor of Poetry strikes one anew with the need for Wordsworth's reforming simplicity.

Huchon, in his life of Crabbe, gives an account of poetry presenting rustic affairs, under the headings of "golden age," "man of nature," and "man of feeling," noting the influence of Rousseau and Gessner, and of the soberer but hardly less optimistic Gray and the idealistic Goldsmith. He concludes: "Such is the flattering picture which the poets drew up to 1780 of village life and manners, either because they were carried away by their imagination, or because, owing to the continuance of patriarchal customs and to the prosperity of agriculture, English country life really did afford a happiness unknown in later times."

The survey we have been making in detail of the literature of the English rustic village affords evidence of truth in both these explanations. The village life of England before it was disturbed by new methods of agriculture, which demanded new distribution of land and

* Grahame's *Birds of Scotland*, 1806, has a more extended treatment of this last theme.

resulted in change of ownership and upsetting of relations between individuals and classes and the disturbance of social standards and customs and ideals, was, except for the hardnesses that are inevitable in any life of toil and inherent in life everywhere, happy and prosperous. At the same time it is evident that poets were too satisfied with the ideas of country life which they had received from their predecessors to look very closely at the reality, and it was only slowly that this reality found its way into expression. It came, however, gradually; Crabbe marks an epoch in the development, but he is not the originator, by any means, of the new view. In the whole process two currents of influence are clearly discernible, the appeal of the universally æsthetic and human in village society, and the pressure of immediate circumstances in current village affairs. The latter is that to which we owe the work of both Goldsmith and Crabbe, who represent two opposing types of treatment, the idyllic and the realistic. After the influence of these men had made itself a part of the literary tradition of the age, a real, whether or not realistic, handling of village affairs was inevitable. The way was cleared for the development of a village literature in which the primary appeal should be the psychological, the human, rather than the social, and in which literary tradition and immediate events should still have their joint influence.

CHAPTER V

THE VILLAGE IN POETRY, 1800-1850

IF the purpose of this study were to trace in village literature a literary *genre*, the prospect offered by the broadening field of the 19th century would be a staggering one. But it is already sufficiently evident that literature dealing with the village is too diversified to constitute a distinct *genre*: it has no unity of conception, no common form, no single and characteristic medium. Moreover there is no evolutionary process discernible in the various appearances of the village theme. It comes into *Waverley* in response to one set of influences, and into Mrs. Gaskell's *North and South* in response to quite another; the forces which led Ebenezer Elliott to write of the village are in the main widely different from those which produced Miss Mitford's sketches of "Our Village." There are, to be sure, literary debts and literary followings, but they form short and discontinuous threads of connection, not a single line of development. As the spirit of experimentation characteristic of the new period led to the development of new literary forms, and changing intellectual and social needs modified the subject-matter of literature, the village had its share in a great number of related and unrelated pieces of prose and poetry.

This lack of immediate and obvious connection does not, however, lessen the interest or importance of village literature as expressive of the life of the English people. Its very diversity has value in exhibiting the interplay of events and interests, of ideas and motives, superficially unrelated, and thus suggesting the complexity of an age which has been the object of at once as much laudation and as much abuse as any in English history. The good and the ill of this age are alike manifest in its treatment of the village and villager.

Wordsworth's attitude toward the village and its people is so distinct from that of all other writers on humble life, that one's first impulse is to omit him from consideration as not belonging in the same category as Goldsmith, Crabbe, Miss Mitford, and the rest. But a second thought corrects this impulse. Though he illumines his Cumberland and Westmoreland villages with a light that never was on sea or land, sees their sunset-lighted spires as pyramids of flame pointing heavenward, and their simple folk as living in a mystic unity with nature, yet after all his villages are those of Westmoreland and Cumberland, and his villagers are English peasants and artisans. And of all the poets who have known and loved the peasantry of England, none has known them so intimately, loved them so deeply, or interpreted them to the world so nobly, as Wordsworth.

Before Wordsworth came to love men for their own sake, he loved them for the sake of the world they lived in. He speaks of

"Shepherds, dwellers in the valleys, men
Whom I already loved; not verily
For their own sakes, but for the fields and hills
Where was their occupation and abode."

And it was tales of men in whose lives the "gentle agency of natural objects" was profoundly operative that led him to think "on man, the heart of man, and human life." And so the deep, unconscious, pervasive influence of nature upon lives spent in close relation to field and hill and wind and cloud is a primary mark of his treatment of the countryman. It was his fortune to be born in a poor district which yet retained

"more of ancient homeliness
Than any other nook of English ground,"

and where a natural and unquestioned equality prevailed; where no one, man or boy, received "attention or respect through claims of wealth or blood." A paradise it was, says Wordsworth, where the forces of nature found a worthy fellow-labourer in man, working freely,

for himself, "with choice of time and place and objects," and leading a life of "simplicity, and beauty, and inevitable grace." It is intelligible that Wordsworth should have turned his face toward individual, as Crabbe his toward social, aspects of humble life. What beauty or inevitable grace belonged to Aldeburgh?

And yet, despite the familiar fact that Wordsworth chose humble and rustic life as the subject of his poetry because in this condition those passions and feelings that are "essential and eternal in the heart" are most clearly and impressively exhibited, and though it was the peasant not as distinct from but as representative of all other classes of men that Wordsworth chiefly regarded, it still remains true that his poems present a body of people almost as clearly differentiated and localized as the Scottish peasantry of Burns. By a succession of remarkable portraits and narratives drawn from the life which he had known from boyhood, Wordsworth makes them clear to our view, in their cottages and on their ancestral fields, engaged in the routine of their common toil and in the rural festivities that still lingered among them,—a people of strength of feeling, of resolute independence, of simplicity and piety and self-respect, bent, to be sure, on substantial needs, but not unaware of the beauty amid which they lived.

It is probable that the village does not come first to one's mind in thinking of Wordsworth's poetry; it is rather the country-side,—mountain passes, paths bordered by holly hedges, remote springs and secluded rocks, isolated cottages,—that rise before the eye at mention of his name. Yet this fact is merely an evidence of the close association between village and country-side in England, for everywhere the poems are full of references to that village life of which the husbandman is assumed to be as much a part as the artisan or the pastor or the school master. The old Beggar makes his way about

"Among the farms and solitary huts,
Hamlets and thinly scattered villages,"

and keeps alive in the unlettered villagers their old-time

kindly mood. Leonard Ewbanks comes home to visit the little church-yard, and ask of the village parson news of his brother.* The old grandsire and the child of three years go pilfering together through the village streets, calling forth the indulgent smiles of all the villagers.† The Poet and the Wanderer ‡ come upon a village wake, and meet a rural funeral procession. Constantly, in one way and another, is the reminder given that all the varied life of the hills and valleys, fields and farms, has a common center in the village.

Wordsworth recognized the similarity of his subject-matter to that of Crabbe by calling attention § to the imaginative influences he himself throws over common life, in contrast to Crabbe's matter-of-fact way of treating the same subjects. The similarity extends to other poets. Certain characters, for example, are almost inevitable in any portrayal of village life. Wordsworth has his village school master, as have Goldsmith and the rest, though his is not the familiar crony among cronies of the *Deserted Village*, or the ignorant and tyrannical master of Ebenezer Elliott's *Splendid Village*. The village parson is with Wordsworth always the "pastor," who tends his flock as they tend their sheep.

Scarcely less familiar are those sad figures which move so darkly through the poetry of the country, vagrants, women crazed by the tragedy of betrayed love and casting the weird shadow of their madness over the sunny countryside they haunt. Recall, for instance, Cowper's Crazy Kate, Wordsworth's poor woman who talked and sang to her babe underneath the haystack or on the greenwood stone, || and that other whose babe no mortal eyes had ever seen and who sat by the old thorn chanting her persistent cry, "Oh misery!" ¶ Crabbe's Phœbe Dawson ** is not mad; true to his habit of throwing upon things the

* *The Brothers.*

† *The Two Thieves.*

‡ *Excursion*, Book II.

§ Introductory note to *Lucy Gray*.

|| *Her eyes are wild.*

¶ *The Thorn.*

** *Parish Register, Marriages.*

clear light of open day, Crabbe depicts her as fully conscious of her shame and suffering: but she is close akin to these other wild and tragic figures.

Wordsworth joins with other poets also in lamenting the disappearance of many precious old rural rites and customs, chief among them the rustic funeral train with its solemn yet uplifting revelation of the awfulness of life, of the bond of brotherhood, of the power of strong, abiding love.* More conventional and familiar is his description of a village wake, with its music and merriment and its garlanded Maypole upon the village green.† In the *Prelude* † he speaks of the same customs regretfully, as of things past, known to him only by report of those who remembered them from times gone by, "lighter graces" which his own more unimaginative days had dropped.

Certain motives of the village theme, noticeably repeated in poetry of the village, appear in Wordsworth. The whole seventh book of the *Excursion*, the *Churchyard among the Mountains*, is not unlike Crabbe's *Parish Register* in idea and plan. The curse of Goody Blake upon Harry Gill parallels that of Hannah Wray upon Ezra White in Elliott's *Village Patriarch*, and finds echo in many poets. Again there is the motive of the returned wanderer, seeking in his native village the happiness that he remembers there in his boyhood. Goldsmith mourned that his early vision of spending his last days in Auburn might never be gratified. Crabbe brings the old sailor, Roger Cuff, back to the parish, rich, and bent on testing the loyalty of his kinsman by presenting himself as poor.§ Ebenezer Elliott builds his *Splendid Village* on the same theme, and Wordsworth pictures the return of Leonard Ewbanks, with mingled hope and misgiving, to the home of his childhood.

The work-house, "House misnamed of Industry," receives scant attention from Wordsworth in comparison to that it has from other men, since in this secluded nook

* *Excursion*, Book II.

† Ibid.

‡ Book VIII.

§ *Parish Register*, *Burials*.

of the world its ministrations have not yet become so necessary and universal. That the old Cumberland Beggar may be saved from its captivity to call forth from the people of the valley an unforced and liberalizing generosity, is Wordsworth's very significant wish. His heart revolts from

"that pent-up din,
Those life-consuming sounds that clog the air,"

but he gives no further description of "the House."

Those national problems which had to do with country affairs Wordsworth met most directly in Book VIII of the *Excursion*, where the Wanderer and the Poet discuss the bright and dark sides of the changes which the manufacturing spirit has wrought in the country. They rejoice in the prosperity that commerce has brought to England, and in her consequent power and authority among nations. They recognize the benefits to agriculture: wherever the traveller turns he sees

"the barren wilderness erased,
Or disappearing; triumph that proclaims
How much the mild directress of the plough
Owes to alliance with these new-born arts."

Moreover, Wordsworth can not but be impressed with another aspect of growing Industry: he exults to see an intellectual mastery exercised over blind elements, and almost a soul given to brute matter. "I rejoice," he says,

"Measuring the force of those gigantic powers
That, by the thinking mind, have been compelled
To serve the will of feeble-bodied Man."

The romance of machinery has great appeal for the poet. But he can not forgive the injuries of Trade. Children working in factories, made to serve as mere spindles or wheels in the vast machine; night turned into day in endless labor; money and goods made the god of life; ancient virtues overthrown, and differences fixed between man and man,—these are the evils that he sees England madly choosing for herself.

Many pictures have been drawn in literature of the sluggishness and torpor, the dull, blank ignorance of the English rustic. In the main, Wordsworth does not draw this picture. Some of his rustics, such as Simon Lee, the old leech-gatherer, the gaunt fisherman too weak to labor in the harvest field, the old Cumberland beggar, are indeed pathetic specimens of humanity. But they are old; they have been beaten in a hard fight, and the gallantry of the conflict is still on them. They were never clods. It did not suit Wordsworth's purpose to portray clods, and indeed the sturdy race of Westmoreland dalesmen were not characteristically such. Yet Wordsworth knew the worst as well as the best of the peasantry. The old Pensioner whose story is told in the second book of the *Excursion* was a sufficient reminder of

"what solitude can breed
Of selfishness, and cruelty, and vice;
Or if it breeds not, hath not power to cure."

Andrew Jones, the villager who stole the lame man's penny, is a character so essentially ugly in soul that his presence in the village is odious: the poet longs for a press-gang or a recruiter's drum to sweep him out of it.

And Wordsworth is open in acknowledging that the evils which he deplotes as coming in the wake of trade are not the first or the greatest evils England has known. He draws a lively picture of squatters at their worst, abject and degraded.* But this is not all. These people, like the gipsy tribe, are outside the pale of civil polity, and he turns to that class early trained to earn their bread by wholesome labor in the field. Clumsy, loutish, stiff of joint and cumbrous of frock, with eyes that have a healthy animal stare but are "wide, sluggish, blank, and ignorant," is his ploughboy.

" 'Is this the whistling ploughboy whose shrill notes
Impart new gladness to the morning air!
Forgive me if I venture to suspect
That many, sweet to hear of in soft verse,
Are of no finer frame."

* *Excursion*, Book VIII.

Wordsworth has his own reaction against a too idealistic conception of the rustic.

The national problem involved in the existence of tens of thousands like this boy, uninformed, their souls sleeping encased in a crust of ignorance, is in Wordsworth's view a pressing one. No city is responsible for him: he is the product of the fields,

"an indigenous vice
Of every country under heaven." *

All the more ought England to beware of new evils, which under the guise of good are making their insidious way into the national life. Moderation in the pursuit of wealth through industries, education for all her humblest folk in city and in village, protection of her helpless from the greed and oppression of the powerful, these are the means to greatness for England.

So Wordsworth's poetry of the peasant is not without explicit relation to current social conditions and events. But its immeasurably greater significance lies in its revelation of the more hidden secret life of the peasantry, those deep-lying permanent human traits which Wordsworth opens to us in sudden fleeting glimpses or under the steady illuminating glow of his imagination. A village woman in the city, feeling a sudden swift rush of longing for the country when some chance sight or incident brings its memories flooding into her heart; a reaper in the field caught up suddenly out of material reality and made strangely into a voice singing of old, unhappy, far-off things; small owners, bound to their land by a deep attachment as to something sentient and responsive, so that they cannot conceive of their fields as happy with another master, and so that they who have been enticed into selling any of their acres suffer under a sense of guilt as at the betrayal of an ancient bond; the slow, still movement of time among people who mark its passing by storms and accidents without and by household incidents within—these are the things that Wordsworth discloses. Once possessing the minds and imaginations of the English

* *Excursion*, Book IX.

people, these things must ennoble their conception of humble life and deepen their sympathy with it.

On bringing out a new edition of his *Village Patriarch* in 1833, Ebenezer Elliott wrote a characteristic Preface. "I am called," he said, "as I expected to be, an unsuccessful imitator of the pauper-poetry of Wordsworth; although, with the exception of his great work, [an important exception, if by 'great work' he meant the *Excursion*,] I never read his writings, until long after this poem was first printed. I might be truly called an unfortunate imitator of Crabbe, that most British of poets; for he has long been bosomed with me; and if he had never lived, it is quite possible that I might never have written pauper-poetry." Elliott puts in his own fashion the difference between Wordsworth and Crabbe. To him it is not a question of an imaginative versus a matter-of-fact treatment of common things, but of a misty and deceptive as opposed to a clear and truthful presentation. The stern colors with which Crabbe has painted "the sublimity of British wretchedness" have, to his mind, been unjustly criticised. That Wordsworth has colored similar objects differently he acknowledges; "but Wordsworth only meets his subject half-way. . . . 'Sly is the look which, o'er his back, that wary poet throws.'"

There was indeed a radical difference in point of view, purpose, and emphasis, between Wordsworth and Crabbe. Elliott's term "pauper-poetry" is in itself significant of the difference. Wordsworth, we may be very sure, would never have used the term of his own poetry. He was not writing of poverty, as a social and economic question, but of people in humble life. Crabbe himself had no such propagandist spirit as Elliott, but the people he knew in Sussex were very different from the Westmoreland dalesmen, and Crabbe was very keenly conscious of the external causes of much of their hardship.

In the *Parish Register*, in which in 1807 he took up the theme where he had dropped it with the *Village* in 1783, he recognized a moral responsibility of which he had taken no account in the earlier poem. The introductory scene which he paints of the new village is a bright one. Every

cottage has its garden, assigned by an indulgent lord, and enjoyed by the cottager as his own; here, on Sunday evening, after service, are scenes of happy comradeship, marked by loud voices, old stories, little wit, but real joy. But this scene is contrasted with another of misery and vice. What the village terms "our Street" is filled with riotous crowds, wrangling, cursing, and shrieking; there is sickness, and dissoluteness, and dirt and wretchedness. Within the houses things are no better, and the garden space around each, now unfenced and grown with weeds, has become a place for cock-fights. These two groups Crabbe seems to say are separated only by their own will and choice.

"Hence good and evil mix'd, but man has skill
And power to part them, when he feels the will!"

Crabbe's new picture of society has greater complexity of detail and variety of coloring than that of *The Village*. Here are small farmers, living, by dint of persistent self-denial, in modest comfort on their few acres; here is the hopelessly poor farmer, the butt of all his neighbors' jokes on the score of his poverty; and here are the large farmers, receiving like lords the humble bows of their tenants. The importance of money as a basis of social standing is clear enough; the large farmer has become a synonym for prosperity:

"Proud was the Miller; money was his pride;
He rode to market, as our farmers ride."

Sometimes this prosperity was accompanied by folly, sometimes by good sense, prevailingly the latter. The farmer's wife has commonly been trained in school, and reluctantly abandons her dancing and music and French for the practical duties of her household. But it is only the matter of a few short years till all her "varnish" is lost, and she appears as the ideal farmer's wife,—happily not the unresting drudge of former days, but the competent mistress of a comfortable and attractive home. *The Widow's Tale* * works this out entertainingly in the story of Nancy Moss, whose mother's pride had sent her to

* *Tales*, 1812.

school, but whose father's sense would stand none of her follies and superiorities when she returned home. Crabbe's testimony would seem then, at this later day, only a partial confirmation of Cowper's criticism of thirty years before.

The absentee system is shown up briefly in the *Parish Register* in the sketch of one lady whose tenants, suffering at the hands of a hard steward, hated her very name.* The Work-house as a training in abasement and cunning deceit appears in the story of Richard Monday, parish waif, brought up in the House and escaped from it to make a fortune in the world and to leave to his native parish at his death £10 quarterly for forty loaves of bread, in satirical recognition of his debt to it. Isaac Ashford, one of the finest figures Crabbe ever drew, lived for years in dread of the Work-house, and was saved from it by a kindly interposing death. His attitude is unique among villagers,—theoretically the correct one, but practically almost unattainable. He feels that men who have given to their community the best efforts of their best years have earned whatever shelter or support they need to claim for their declining age, and hence to such a man the Work-house is no disgrace. But the thing that spoils for Isaac what poor comfort he might find in this reflection is the inhuman—at least wholly impersonal and unfeeling—system of farming out work-houses. With one of the old-time masters he might have been content; not with a selfish, greedy manager who looks upon him and the other pensioners as a mere investment, who cares only to administer the House in such a way as to put into his own pocket every penny he can squeeze out from their scanty dole.

Other conditions, good and bad, of country village life are reflected with equal realism and faithfulness in the *Parish Register*. It is easy to see how to a social agitator and reformer like Ebenezer Elliott Crabbe would be more satisfying than Wordsworth.

Artistically the advance of the *Parish Register* over the *Village* is well known. For fire of indignation and con-

* *Burials. The Lady of the Hall.*

densed and dramatic presentation nothing in Crabbe's poetry anywhere surpasses certain passages in the *Village*. But the sketches of types in the early poem become full-length, detailed portraits in the later work; the gloom is relieved by lightness of tone and some humor; contrast and variety replace singleness of effect; narrative skill and keen psychological insight develop. *The Village* is powerfully impressive; the later poem is impressive and interesting and entertaining in turn.

The Borough (1809) furnishes one of the first instances of the carrying over of the idea of village literature into a different field. A Borough is a very different place from a village and the possibilities of the subject are not the same. The small community has grown into a larger; the stage is wider, the play of life more complex and more sophisticated; the actors are drawn no longer mainly from humble life, but from that between humble and great. But it is still the study of a society. Men are viewed in their social connections, as the products of the situation in which fortune has set them. New elements enter with the more extended range of affairs: Methodism, elections, clubs, inns, plays and players, schools (beyond the simple village school), trades and professions. But also the old interests of village life are retained or paralleled. For example, instead of the peasant's joy in his evening fireside and his family, or his semi-recreation of hoeing in his own garden plot, we have the tradesman's hobby,—the study of bird-calls, researches with the microscope, the collection of butterflies and moths,—pursuits more like those of a commuting suburbanite than of an old time villager.

Crabbe's reason for his choice of this middle class life is evidence, if any were needed, of how little he was a reformer or propagandist, and how thoroughly committed to the aim of transcribing life and exhibiting character for its own sake,—or more exactly, for the sake of an understanding sympathy between man and man. He chooses it, he says,* because in this order of society is seen the least display of vanity, and more originality of

* *Life and Poems*, London, 1834, Vol. 3, p. 13, Note.

character and variety of fortune than are met with elsewhere. These people do not live in the eye of the world, to be kept in awe by dread of observation and indecorum, and on the other hand they are not debarred by want of means from the cultivation of mind and the pursuits of wealth and ambition. George Sand made a corresponding claim, differing of course in detail, for the distinctive claims of village life upon the interest of writers, and the parallel with Wordsworth's choice of humble and rustic life is apparent.

By far the most significant of the later figures whose concern for the village was social rather than purely literary is Ebenezer Elliott. Only William Cobbett among the patrons and protectors of village folk rivals him in picturesqueness of life and personality, and in the burning zeal with which he advocated his chosen cause. His poetry presents the village in its connection with that source of long contention in English labor questions, the Corn Laws.

As to the real effect of these laws students are not yet agreed. The principles involved in them are still living issues, and even yet, three-quarters of a century after their repeal, they are subject to interpretation according to each critic's political beliefs and affiliations, and they are condemned, condoned, and defended, variously. But Elliott felt no shadow of doubt concerning them. He regarded them as beyond question the most pernicious source of evil existing in England in his day, and against them, the hated "bread-tax," he directed all the force of his sturdy intellect and his poetic gift. He believed they were bringing loss or ruin upon all classes: upon industrial capitalists directly in the restriction of industry and the diversion of British capital into foreign investment; upon landowners and agriculturists indirectly, as a result of a general interference with prosperity, despite a temporary and factitious advantage in the higher price of corn; and upon laborers in industry and agriculture most immediately and certainly of all, in consequence of the cruelly high prices which these nefarious laws imposed upon all the necessities of life.

Elliott's own interests lay primarily with industrial laborers and small capitalists. He was not a countryman, but a townsman and a mechanic, engaged, like his father before him, in the iron trade. Yet he was concerned for the welfare of all the working people of England, peasant as well as artisan, and the wrongs of the peasant he felt to be even greater than those of the industrial laborer. Thus the poetry of a mechanic and a capitalist in industry came to concern itself with the village and villager. "The degradation of our once noble peasantry" * was to Elliott not the least sad result of the "bread-tax," and the peasant shares about equally with the artisan in his verse.

Elliott's first work was imitative, some of it fantastic and most of it ultra-romantic, the product of idle musings and eager, undirected reading. But fortunately for his usefulness as a poet, circumstances led him fairly early into practical interests. As a young man between the ages of sixteen and twenty-three he worked as his father's apprentice, with only pocket money for pay; later, marrying, he invested his wife's small fortune in the business in which his father was already interested, and after years of effort to save a sinking concern, lost it all. For some time he was dependent on his wife's sisters, who at length raised for him a small capital which he again invested in the iron business, this time at Sheffield. The venture succeeded, and after various further ups and downs of fortune Elliott finally retired (in 1842) with about £6,000. All his difficulties he attributed to the operation of the Corn Laws, and his hostility to these laws became the central, almost the only, theme of his verse. Notwithstanding his long narrative and dramatic poems and some early descriptive verse, his poetry is typically political in theme and humanitarian in purpose. He is primarily and distinctively the Corn Law Rhymers.

The fervor and force of his attack arrested quick attention. H. F. Cary, writing to John Clare, October 30, 1832, said of the *Corn Law Rhymes*: "his are not words that burn, but words that scald. . . . They are the only new things I have been struck with for some time."

* Works, London, 1844, Vol. I, p. 15; Preface to *The Village Patriarch*.

Carlyle hailed Elliott's three little volumes, published in 1831, as the work of a man belonging to "that singular class who have something to say," a man not school-trained, but possessed of a rational god-created soul and by no means to be patronized as in the category of "Uneducated Poets." "For a generation that reads Cobbett's *Prose* and Burns's *Poetry*," says Carlyle, "it need be no miracle that here also is a man who can handle both pen and hammer like a man." *The Westminster Review* (July, 1829) saw in Elliott's newly published *Village Patriarch* an indication of the fact that there is a power which can not be reached either by force or by law, namely, the power of thought. Excess and violence can be met, but opinion is irresistible, says the reviewer, and Elliott's poetry, "full of merit and of mind," has passages remarkable for their poetry or their power, but is most valuable as indicative of what is passing among the laboring classes.

Elliott came naturally enough by his fiery and independent spirit, for he was the descendant on his father's side of a lawless race of borderers and on his mother's of sturdy free-holders, who had dwelt on their piece of free-hold land from time immemorial. His father, a radical in politics and an ultra-Calvinist in religion, was known significantly as "Devil Elliott." The capacity for strong feeling which such an origin imparted, confirmed by the circumstances of his life, made Elliott capable of the extremest wrath. "Is it strange," he asks, "that my language is fervent as a welding heat, when my thoughts are *passions*, that rush burning from my mind, like white-hot bolts of steel?"* He could write:

"Avenge the plunder'd poor, oh Lord! . . .
But not with sword—no, not with fire
Chastise the British locustry!
Lord let them feel thy heavier ire;
Whip them, oh Lord, with poverty!"

The words are not unworthy of the son of "Devil Elliott."
Yet this is not all of the man. Curiously enough he

* *Ibid.* Vol. 1, p. 51. Preface to *Corn Law Rhymes*.

was by temperament mild and unaggressive, even diffident, and his fervid emotion was singularly free from narrow personal bitterness. It was public ills, of which his own were representative, that aroused his rage.* The exaggerated touchiness which often marks the self-educated poet was quite absent from his spirit. He defended with deep earnestness, to be sure, his poetic practice of "rhyming politics," against which certain friendly critics had advised him; but it was his theory and not his poetry for which he took up arms. As to the latter he said, "There are many mechanics in Sheffield, who can write better than the author of the *Corn Law Rhymes*."

The charge that he was an inciter of sedition among the poor touched him in a tenderer spot, and he refuted the charge with violence. "He is a lying varlet who says I ever excited the poor to revenge. The single purpose of my writings is, to prevent the catastrophe which the oppressors of all are bringing on themselves and the nation." Here and there a touch of cynicism reflects his scorn of caste and oppression, as when † he thanks "two generous critics" who had praised his "little, unpuffed, unadvertised book" so highly that he was almost compelled to doubt whether he still lived in England. "What! in the land of castes and cant, take a poor self-educated man by the hand, and declare to the world that his book is worth reading?" But such cynicism is far less frequent than frank and sincere gratitude to critics and readers for their friendly reception and appreciation of his work.

All through Elliott's childhood and youth he had the habit of running away from the foundries and factories of his native town and spending hours by himself, now delighting in the beauty of a little green snake curled up in the lee of a rock, and now studying the flowers of the

* "When suicidal anti-profit laws speak to my heart from my children's trenchers—when statutes for restricting the industry of a population, which is only super-abundant because it is oppressed, threaten to send me to the treadmill, for the crime of inflicted want—when in a word, my feelings are *hammered* till they are 'cold-short'—habit can no longer bend them to courtesy; they snap—and fly off in a sarcasm." *Ibid.* Vol. I, p. 50.

† *Ibid.* Vol. I, p. 47; Preface to *Corn Law Rhymes*.

countryside. The lasting influence of such hours is evident in his poetry. In his stern and bitter verse there is still at times a beautiful tenderness; his denunciations and maledictions give way now and then to a delicate, sweet delight in a lovely human spirit or a beautiful aspect of nature. He sees with joy the

“realms of hawthorne, white with little globes
In which is folded up May’s fragrant snow;”

he flashes a charming glimpse of the church of the hamlet, enshrouded in “coeval elms,” a temple within a temple;* he begs that the poet of the village, dead in the Work-house, may be buried where there is sunlight: to a grave near his grandsire, “a village seer, who liv’d below’d,” hither “bear ye the child of flowers.”† The fineness and delicacy of Elliott’s feeling is no less notable, though less often manifest, than its strength and fervor.

It is not surprising that such a man should give the village a prominent place in his poetry. Its beauty was an inseparable part of that beauty of nature which from boyhood had been his refuge from the dingy ugliness of his daily surroundings. In the strongly marked, individual characters of its people his deep and sympathetic interest in human nature found satisfaction. In the security, pleasantness, and dignity of its former life his ideal for society was in some degree realized, while the vanishing of the old order epitomized for him that needless thwarting of happiness, of hope and ambition, which laborers everywhere were suffering at the hands of a selfish ruling class. Moreover, the literary trail was ready blazed for him; Goldsmith, Crabbe, Cowper, Burns, Bloomfield offered models to his hand, and the reading public was cordial to poems of farm and village life. It was almost inevitable that Elliott should write of the village, and from his peculiar vantage point as an industrial laborer interested in its problems, should make a really individual contribution to its literature.

Elliott’s two chief village poems are *The Splendid*

* *The Year of Seeds*; sonnet 21.

† *Ibid.*; sonnet 16.

Village * and *The Village Patriarch*.† One of Elliott's critics says of his *Corn Law Rhymes*, "the rhapsodies, absurdities, and commonplaces of his other poetry are absent from these." The remark is too sweeping. The two village poems are more readable than the *Corn Law Rhymes*, free from their excess and violence and expressing in narrative and pictorial form the same economic and political views.

The Splendid Village is a poem in rhymed couplets, some thirty pages long, and in two books. The title is quite evidently suggested by Goldsmith's lines:

"'Tis yours to judge how wide the limits stand
Between a splendid and a happy land."

The theme is the change in the village from the old simple equality of station and community of interests to the new arrogance and display and tyrannical exercise of authority. The return of a long absent villager to his native hamlet affords opportunity for a series of contrasting scenes. The Wanderer, returning eagerly to his old home, finds everything changed. The very cottage strikes him with dismay by its desolate, neglected look; his family is scattered, one sister living on parish pay, and his brother, dulled by hardship, is surrounded by a ragged and quarrelsome family. Shocked and saddened, the Wanderer seeks an explanation in the village at large, and the poem continues, after the manner of one of Crabbe's, with a series of sketches of people and affairs. The old village school is supplanted by a new fangled "academy" in which gentlemen are taught—nothing. The lord's steward is the village butcher's son, who in his new authority is coarse, overbearing, and cruel. The lawyer and the doctor vie with each other in the splendor of their estates; the lawyer's at present consists of three acres and a park-like gate for which he hopes in time to buy a park, though he has dispossessed three cottars to

* No date is given for this poem; all accounts evade the point. A reference in the Preface suggests 1831,—if this Preface were written for the first edition, which is not certain.

† 1829.

secure even his present splendor. The curate is made out a pitiable half-man, underpaid by the absentee rector, who furnishes Elliott with a rather sorry jest, being

“a queer plural, one and three,
Yet not quite singular in trilogy!”

The old inn has lost the generous hospitality of former days, now that it is run by the Constable and Bailiff, who is hated and feared by all the poor,—except by the poacher Jem, who someway has the great man under his thumb. Many things of the old village are gone,—that “path of the quiet fields” along which the poor man was wont to come whistling homeward at evening; the Common, together with the independence and open frankness of the villagers who lived by its aid,—“The very children seem afraid to smile,” says Elliott; * gone is the old village festival held yearly, when June

“Sat with the rose to hear the gold-spink’s tune,”

and lovers stole through lanes

“sun-bright with dewy broom,
By fragrant hedge-rows, sheeted o’er with bloom;—
Feast of the happy village! where art thou?
Pshaw! thou wert vulgar—we are splendid now.”

Instead of such homely things the country boasts of a Tuscan palace, proud domes, kennels and “dogs sublime.” What matter if “the father of this kingling was a boor” and if to furnish forth his splendor the yeoman must resign his grandsire’s land?

Musings of the traveller, reminiscences of a happier time, afford opportunity for the presentation of some attractive pictures,—boys playing leap-frog on the green, lovers lingering along shady paths, sheep in the fold, and

* The line seems extravagant, yet Bourne, in his *Change in the Village* notes the same thing in sober prose and for a much later and happier day. With the enclosing of the common boys lose their sense of freedom, and skulk or duck their heads and run defiantly in the expectation of being recalled from forbidden ground.

all the familiar idyllic touches. The poem concludes with the departure of the traveller upon new wanderings. *The Splendid Village* is certainly not a cheering poem. The mere recital of its contents reveals its nature fairly. Obviously it owes a large debt to both Goldsmith and Crabbe.

A much longer and more ambitious poem is *The Village Patriarch*, first published in 1829. It is ten books and some one hundred and thirty pages long, written in terza rima. Its social and economic ideas are practically identical with those of the *Splendid Village*, but the form in which they are embodied is much freer, more imaginative, and more concretely real. Enoch Wray, old, blind, and poor, but with a fine spirit still, is the central figure, about which the poem is rather loosely built. A slight thread of story runs through the ten books, but it is very unevenly followed. Some two or three of the books are pure narrative, as that (the sixth) which tells the supposedly humorous but not very funny story of old Enoch's courtship of the toothless, blear-eyed, shrewd Alice Green,—a courtship happily cut short by a loss of temper in both parties to it; or that dramatic eighth book, which in its story of Hannah Wray rivals Crabbe in tragic intensity and power.* Most of the books, however, are more general in character, carry forward a little story and present pictures of social conditions, and reflections upon these.

One does not need the hint in the Preface of 1833 to see Crabbe's influence strong in *The Village Patriarch*, but Eliott's frank avowal disarms criticism. Goldsmith he does

* Hannah is the widow of Enoch's son, who has been put to death as a poacher. She has been unable to pay her rent, and her landlord, to dispossess her, has unthatched her cottage. She and her little idiot daughter are busy spiritedly repairing the thatch when the landlord discovers them. In a frenzy of rage he seizes Hannah by the throat and is choking her, when the little girl, seeing that her mother is suffering, picks up a stone and throws it, and by a strange chance kills the man. To save her child Hannah takes the guilt upon herself, and pays the death penalty. On the scaffold she pronounces a horrible curse upon the man's fields and race:

"God! let him sow in vain! let nothing grow!
God! may a mother's curse be on their blood!"

not mention, but evidently follows here and there. He has something of Goldsmith's own kindly humor. Witness, for example, his picture of the village poet, Enoch's rival in immortal verse, "wise to compose, and willing to rehearse." There is a passage of the country churchyard sort going back to Gray no doubt, yet more like the Churchyard of the *Excursion*, and except for the poetic machinery still more like Book III of the *Parish Register*.

Very interesting, because new with Elliott, is his comparison of agricultural and industrial laborers. The poor villager who has come to the city out of necessity, being dispossessed of his land or deprived of his means of livelihood in the country, is of course an unskilled laborer in practically all city work. Hence his fate is that described in a passage from the poem, *Love*, long hours of night labor, and a workhouse dole.* But the laborer native to the city and skilled in his trade is more fortunate, and Elliott can call his own Sheffield "town of the unbowed poor.†" Though the young artisan must labor endlessly, and his masters tax and grind him fiercely, yet

"he still can get
A crust of *wheaten* bread, despite their frowns;
They have not sent him like a pauper yet
For workhouse wages, as they send their clowns;
Such tactics do not answer yet, in towns."

Moreover he has not lost his intellectual dignity; he

* "Alas, sweet Auburn!—since thy Bard bewail'd
'Thy bowers, by Trade's unfeeling sons assail'd,'
How many a village, sweet like thee, hath seen
The once blest cottage joyless on the green!
Now e'en 'the last of all thy harmless train,
The sad historian of the pensive plain,'
Hath ceas'd to 'bend above the plashy spring,'
And her fall'n children breathe their curses deep,
Far from that home of which they think, and weep.
Where myriad chimneys wrap their dens in shade,
They rob the night to ply their sickly trade,
And weekly come, with subjugated soul,
Degraded, lost, to ask the workhouse dole."

* *Village Patriarch*, Book III.

"reads usefully," writes with no mean skill, and can reason well. Though he can not hope to marry—

"Too poor, too proud, too just, too wise, to wed,"—

and though his toil bids fair to end only with his life, yet he is not wholly wretched. In comparison with him the rustic is a sad figure.

"How unlike thee, though once erect and proud,
Is England's peasant slave, the trodden down,
The parish paid, in soul and body bow'd!"*

In the *Village Patriarch* there is one villager yet unsubdued. Jem, the rogue professed, whose trade is poaching, commands a certain respect for his success in enforcing his own accepted principle that Power is Right, and for his refusal to be downed by fate. But Jem's power is brutal: "he reads not, writes not, thinks not, scarcely feels"; he represents the degradation of the English rustic no less than does the pauper on the rounds.

The keynote of all Elliott's work seems to be his strong humanity. He loved nature, but no beauty of nature could beguile him from the truth concerning man. If the poor man's cottage concealed suffering within its walls, its beauty became to him a mockery.

"The scentless rose, train'd by the poor,
May sometimes grace the peasant's door.
But when will comfort enter there? . . .
His pay is pain, his hope despair,
Although the cottage rose is fair!
Out of his weekly pittance small,
Three crowns, for children, wife, and all,
Poor British slave! how can he save
A pittance for his evening's close?
No roses deck the workhouse-grave!
Where is the aged pauper's rose?" †

* In *Steam, at Sheffield* the same distinction is drawn. The poet is urging the advantage of town life against one who loves the country and is inclined to be scornful of the town and trade:

"Trade makes thee sage; lo, thou read'st Locke and Scott!
While the poor rustic beast-like lives and dies,
Blind to the page of priceless mysteries."

† *British Rural Cottages in 1842.*

His love for nature did not make him despise the town and the works of man.

"If thou lov'st nature, sympathise with man,
For he, and his, are parts of nature's plan." *

It was because of this love that Elliott guarded so jealously man's dignity, and resented so fiercely his degradation. The tragedy of the workhouse,—“that House where want is fed by Scorn,”—is its outrage to the spirit of the pauper. He demanded of men self-respect and up-standing independence. The old village schoolmaster he called, half pityingly, half scornfully:

“A half fac'd man, too timid for his trade,
And paid as timid men are ever paid.” †

And of the wretched usher in the “Academy,” successor to the village school, he speaks still more strongly:

“Servant of servants, brow-beat like a knave!
Why for a coffin labour like a slave?
Better break granite on the king's highway
Than earn, with Porson's powers, a pauper's pay.
Why die to live? I know a wiser plan—
An easier too—black shoes, and be a man!” ‡

Nothing about Elliott is more attractive than his singularly impersonal attitude toward his own work. He did not take his poetry lightly; he was tremendously in earnest and felt seriously the responsibility of his influence as a writer. But he was under no illusions concerning the value of his work. “If my composition smell of the ware-house, I cannot help it; soot is soot; and he who lives in a chimney will do well to take the air when he can, and ruralize now and then, even in imagination.” Dr. Holland had called him national; Elliott accepted the term, but observed that a great poet is not national but universal. He defied anybody to read his poetry through—he had attempted it himself once, beginning with the

* *Steam.*

† *The Splendid Village.*

‡ *Ibid.*

Vernal Walk, his earliest poem, and was sound asleep in ten minutes! It may be suggested that many an English poet might have put himself to sleep by the poetic product of his seventeenth year. There is not the least insincerity or cynicism in Elliott's self-deprecatory remarks, only amusement and honest self-appraisal.

And his judgment was a fair one. A man with so single an idea and so biassed a feeling could not possibly give a clear picture of life as a whole. He could see only one aspect of things and see it under one coloring. But he was of undoubted service to his age, and his work is still impressive for its power and often very enjoyable for its poetic beauty.

Wordsworth, Crabbe, and Elliott, the three outstanding poets of village life for the first thirty years of the century, may be taken as representing three different and typical attitudes toward the subject of the village. For Wordsworth the human interest of individual lives was the chief motive, with social matter dimly present in the background. Crabbe thought of a man, first of all, as a member of a particular social group, though he had no program to advance and stopped far short of a propagandist spirit. Elliott wrote of the village because he considered the villager a man oppressed and believed that by this means he could further his emancipation. These three motives and interests appear in various modifications in the work of many lesser poets who during this same period were engaged upon the same topic.

The note of change in the village which has been struck more insistently than any other in the work of the three poets just considered is heard throughout the whole half century. The encroachments of industrialism upon the country, the vanishing of old customs, the readjustment of social relations, the creeping in of new and unwelcome religious ideas,—all these things recur again and again even when they are not the chief concern of the poet. All the more genuinely, in such case, do they attest the apprehensiveness with which these changes were commonly regarded. Some of the dread arose, doubtless, from that natural conservatism of mind which instinct-

ively fears the new, and that conservatism of sentiment which clings to the old out of mere affection for it. But all sorts of writers on village life, poets out of the universities, country gentlemen, untaught husbandmen, industrial workingmen, and clergymen, all echo the same outcry until there is no doubting the reality of their convictions.

Outside the bounds of pure literature, also, there is abundant evidence of a very general interest in village affairs during this period. Publishers' catalogues show an astonishing number of books of village sermons, educational tracts dealing with the village school, works on cottage architecture, discussions of economic questions in rural life.* Various men made "progresses" through the rural districts of England and Scotland and published their observations. Friendly societies and savings-bank schemes were inaugurated. Quite evidently the problems resulting from the disintegration of the old coöperative village were making themselves felt as demanding action. It is the less surprising, therefore, to find that in poetry, taking the period as a whole, the more purely literary and æsthetic interests came to predominate over the social and economic. The effort to right wrongs and grievances spent itself more and more in practical measures, while literature, despite its consciousness of current events and conditions, became increasingly preoccupied with the beauty and pleasantness, the folly and humor and good old homeliness, of English peasant life and character.

At the outset of the century, while Wordsworth in Grasmere Vale was revealing to the world the heart of the Westmoreland peasant, Robert Bloomfield, in a London garret, was picturing with remarkable faithfulness and clarity the rustic life of his native Suffolk. *The Farmer's Boy*, published in 1800, received immediate recognition, and won for its humble author a fame which the intrinsic

* See titles such as these: *The Village Ale-house: a conversation on the price of bread* (1805); *The Village School Improved* (3rd ed. 1816); *The Villager's Agricultural Companion* (1812-1820); *Village Library for the use of young persons* (1802); *The Village Doctor, or Family Vade Mecum*; most notably Cobbett's *Cottage Economy*, *Rural Rides*, and *Twopenny Trash, or Politics for the Poor*.

value of his poetry does not justify to us now, but which is highly significant both of the taste and of the state of poetry of his day. The book reached a sale of 26,000 in three years, and was translated into French and Italian, and part of it into Latin hexameters.

Bloomfield (1766-1823) was the son of a tailor in a Suffolk village, where after his father's death his mother kept the village school. At the age of eleven Robert was sent into the home of his uncle, a farmer in the neighboring town of Sapiston, where he acquired his knowledge of rustic life and manners. At fifteen, being too small to be of use on the farm, he went to London, and under his brother's guardianship learned the trade of shoe-making. He ran errands, read the newspaper aloud to the older workers, heard sermons on Sunday evenings in the language of the *Rambler* (thus learning the pronunciation of "hard words"), followed carefully the poet's corner of the *London Magazine*, and devoured Thomson and Milton, whom he found among the few books of a fellow worker. This about finishes the tale of his education. He married in 1790, and was living in squalid poverty when the publication of the *Farmer's Boy* in 1800, under the generous and efficient patronage of Capel Lofft, brought him relief. *Rural Tales* (1802), *Good Tidings, or News from the Farm* (1804), and *Wild Flowers* (1806) followed. His prosperity was short-lived, for he had no gift for affairs, and investing his capital unwisely, became bankrupt. In his last years he was in a state of hypochondria which would undoubtedly have become madness if death had not intervened. He died in great poverty in 1823. John Wilson, writing in 1835 in praise of John Clare, another peasant poet, reminded England of what she had done to her Farmer Boy, and ended with a curt, "Hush then about Burns!"

The Farmer's Boy is built after the model of Thomson in four books named for the seasons, and presents the occupations and experiences of farm life, outdoors and in. It is sincere, faithful poetry, rather remarkably free from subservience to models, and full of vigor and spirit. Charles Lamb missed from it the strong intelligence and the

"poet dignity" of Burns, and found it all rather childish, with its phrases about "poor Giles," and so on. It has certainly no depth or originality of thought, and is to be judged solely as objective description. On this ground, W. H. Hudson, who knew rural England with unusual intimacy, could say that in his South American home, when he had as yet never seen England, Bloomfield was the only poet he found who gave him anything like an extended and continuous view of English rural life.*

In *Rural Tales* Bloomfield's sympathetic, truthful delineation of English peasant folk appears at its best. The homely ballads and tales well repay reading for their simple but adequate characterization and their realistic pictures. *Richard and Kate, or Fair Day*, for example, a Suffolk ballad, is genuinely pleasant. A couple, married forty years, go to the fair to meet their married children and have a generally good time. Richard is well suggested, a kindly old man, very easily mellowed by ale and inclined to be jolly; his wife is prudent, and yet sympathetic with Richard's pleasures; she stops to reflect on the age of an old tree which they pass, and he is impatient to be on:

"Well, Goody, don't stand preaching now;
Folks don't preach sermons at a fair."

In such a tale as this Bloomfield's poetic lineage is evident in his fondness for the heroic couplet, and for capital letters and personifications, but the effect of these things is counteracted by his homely details, his very life-like conversation, and his use of the language of common speech, with a touch of dialect.

The Miller's Maid (*Rural Tales*) tells a romantic story of village people, later used for a comic opera under the same title. *Market Night* pictures a wife waiting at home for her husband to return from market through a heavy storm, full of fears for him and fancies of his danger on the way.† *Walter and Kate* is the love story of a young

* *Afoot in England*, chapter entitled *Troston*.

† Compare incident in Thomson's *Winter*, and Akenside's *Winter Solstice*.

blacksmith and a girl in service, whose lives are nearly ruined by poverty. *The Widow Jones* is the tale of a man who hurried up his suit for the hand of a widow he had rather half-heartedly wished to marry, for the sake of buying with her money the old horse with which he had long worked and which its owner was about to sell into labor too hard for its poor old frame. Fortunately the widow appreciated his aim and consented, and all three lived happy ever after.*

Bloomfield's poetry touches now and then, and in great seriousness, upon the poverty that was a constant menace, and sometimes an overpowering disaster, to humble people. It speaks regretfully of the passing of the old time equality and the coming in of greater and greater separation between rich and poor. But it portrays a sturdiness of resistance to ill fortune, and a comfortable enjoyment of good things in life such as comradeship, stout ale, love, and practical jokes, so that the tone of the whole is bracing rather than depressing. If we cannot agree with a contemporary critic of Bloomfield † that he "has raised English peasants to an equality with their Scottish neighbours," we can see how it happened that he did, at least, by his unaffected and truthful delineation "awaken a strong sympathy among the more fortunate classes toward the lowest class of the community." His impulse and aim were identical with those of Burns; his gifts of mind and spirit were immeasurably less.‡

* The poem is to be associated with many others exhibiting the same humane feeling for animals. See for example a passage in *Winter of the Farmer's Boy* on the post-horse, and one from the third book of Elliott's *Village Patriarch* on the coach-horse.

† James Montgomery; magazine article 1811, quoted in letter to Hannah Bloomfield in 1824.

‡ Bloomfield's turn for realism, to which the value of his poetry is largely due, is entertainingly shown in some notes on certain pictures. In "A Storm in Harvest," by Westall, he objects to the sheaves, which he calls a bad crop. Moreover, the man and woman in the foreground are facing the weather: "is it not natural for men as well as beasts to turn their backs to the weather?" In another picture he likes the attitude of the "Peasant Boy"; "but his clothing, from the waist downward, is in the Bond-street cut. Such breeches and stockings were never on a peasant boy, unless they came to him second hand from the Squire."

The value of Bloomfield's work to his time, and the reason for its quick reception appear from a comparison with other things of the same day. Far as it was below Wordsworth's, yet by its simple objectivity, as well as by conformity to accepted traditions of poetic form, it was easier to read and understand. And most poetry of country life lacked its reality and its liveliness. A few illustrations will show the slavish imitation in much of the current verse dealing with country people.

In 1803 were published some poems written at the ripe age of fourteen or fifteen by that unfortunately precocious boy, Henry Kirke White (1785-1806). It is obviously unfair to judge them as anything but the most juvenile of Juvenilia, and as such their imitativeness is natural enough. *Clifton Grove* (1800) and *Childhood* (1799) are both in the vein of Goldsmith, reminiscent and pensive. *Clifton Grove* deals less directly with village life and scenes; it is largely concerned with nature, and introspective, in the way of a very young poet. *Childhood* has the interest of scenes drawn from the poet's own boyhood in the village. Its picture of the dame school, where the boy suffered some hardship in becoming "inured to alphabetic toil," is really good. The form is heroic couplet, and the poem suggests both Shenstone and Goldsmith. *Lines on visiting an obscure, romantic hamlet*, by W. Case, Jr., in the *Poetical Register* for 1801, are equally imitative. The poet speaks of the hamlet as having bloomed

"In humble privacy, unseen, unknown,
Save by a few whom labour calls her own."

Birds described as "plumy jubilants" sing upon the bough, and evening falls in a Gray-like line descriptive of "the unyoked steeds that homeward drag their way."

Miss Seward, the Swan of Lichfield, sang a dying strain for the eighteenth century in her *Hay-field, a Morning Scene* (1801). The title shows its antique affiliations. There is much personification: Beauty twines the glowing wreath, Joy's blushes are warm, Labor is busy in the dale.

All this is precisely in the vein of George Eliot's comment upon the peasant of art. *Post*, p. 204.

Lucy, tripping along with her milking pail, meets nine blooming maidens, who "ask and tell the tender tale of love." Suddenly "the expected youths" arrive, and now it is that Labor becomes busy in the dale. In cottages near by

"The careful Parents of the Village dwell
And mix the savory pottage in the cell,"—

or in other words are in the house getting breakfast. The children take this same pottage to "Ceres' happy train" in the fields, and "health's warm viand rises to the brim" of the earthen vessel. The village church-bells peal for a wedding and the laborers listen with a thought of their own happy futures. "All is frolic, innocence, and love."

Nothing could throw into greater relief the characteristic reality and naturalness of the new poetry than this artificial, round-about, old-fashioned disguising of simple and familiar scenes. One thinks of *Richard and Kate*, or of *Alice Fell* or *The Idiot Boy* with grateful relief.

Better than these, because reflecting directly and therefore interestingly the conditions of actual life, is *Village Scenes, the Progress of Agriculture, and other poems*, 1804, by T. Bachelor. The poet is an unlearned admirer of Thomson, Goldsmith, and all the "rural train" of poets. He recognizes, in a preface, his own lack of learning and the deficiencies of his poetry, though perhaps he does not completely sound the depths of these deficiencies. His admiration he expresses by such lines as "Sweet Village! loveliest of the rural plain," and

"Nor let the splendid sons of wealth disdain
These simple arts that mark the rural train."

The *Village Scenes* is made up of vague reminiscence; there is much apostrophe and personification in it, some generalized description, and some detailed pictures suggested but not carried out; a comparison of the guilt, crowd, dirt of the city with the open air, innocence, purity of the country; there are moral reflections, and one clear, intelligible story of love, marriage, and death. In his

preface the author said that his poem differed from the *Deserted Village* or the *Pleasures of Memory* in that he had selected events as they were likely to occur, without attempting to crowd into one poem either all melancholy or all joyful incidents. The variety is undeniable, but commendation stops there.

The Progress of Agriculture, however, is another story. Bachelor, who wrote his poems "in the casual and short intervals of rural occupations," was here more at home, and though he still found clearness difficult he at least had something of his own to say. It is the progress of agriculture during his own age that he presents: concentration of a man's land so that its ownership need no longer be marked by rude initials in the sand; improvements in drainage; enclosures as a means to better cultivation. To all these things he pays tribute. But the most fervid part of the poem is the complaint of the peasant that all this improvement should be at the expense of the poor and to the advantage only of the rich. He draws a striking picture of landlords—those cruel "little-great"—who will not relieve the distresses of the poor. He deplores the growing separation of poor and rich: "Long-wonted feasts grow formal, distant, cold." The relentless appropriations of land by large landowners, greedy for every slightest possible addition to their wide fields, he describes with resentment:

"With rapid strides his wide dominion spreads,
E'en to the eaves of Penury's crumbling sheds,
And while his fields in boundless prospect rise,
Scarce views a garden with unenvious eyes."

The whole poem has the ring of sincerity.

That change in the peasantry both of England and of Scotland which was evidently widely felt was often attributed in a very general way to "Trade," as something inherently mischievous. So John Struthers, in a poem of ninety Spenserian stanzas entitled *The Plough*,* exalts the old-time glory of the plough now given way to the false glory of commerce. He paints a picture of the plough-

* Glasgow, 1818.

man's year, by months, in which all is as virtuous and happy and peaceful as Parnell or Hammond ever made it. He sketches the history of those nations that fell into decay because they sacrificed the welfare of their tillers of the soil to the luxury and avarice of the rich; war and commerce, he declares, are alike dependent on the plough. He exhorts country dwellers of Scotland not to be drawn by vain hopes to migrate to a land, where,

"By Susquehannah, wild, or Niagara drear,"

defeat awaits them: the soldier of Scotland must not return from the fields of Europe to find his hamlet deserted. As often in such strains of lament and apprehension, religious degeneration is represented as accompanying the spread of the commercial spirit. Struthers finds irreligion rife in England and spreading into Scotland.

In Scotland the influence of Ramsay and Burns produced some lingering adherents and practitioners of pastoral poetry. In 1806 a conscientiously painstaking poet, anonymous, published *The Falls of Clyde, or The Fairies*, "a Scottish Dramatic Pastoral, in five acts, with three preliminary dissertations." * The "dissertations" discuss: (1) Fairies; (2) The Scottish Language; and (3) Pastoral Poetry. The pastoral itself emerges from under the weight of these encumbrances with a surprising lightness and vigor. The poet must have done his poem first and his dissertations afterward. He writes in avowed discipleship of Ramsay, and except for some pretty fairy scenes his play is a realistic one of Scottish life. The child of a country gentleman, stolen by fairies as an infant, is reclaimed at the age of sixteen by Jamie, her lover and her father's neighbor. The time is supposed to be at the close of the 16th century, though except for the unwonted activity of the fairies it might as well have been called of the 19th. The humor of the piece is quite delightful, and it has some good character studies.

In 1829 the pastoral trail was followed by W. M. Hetherington, with his *Twelve Dramatic Sketches founded on the*

* Edinburgh and London, 1806.

Pastoral Poetry of Scotland. Hetherington is more interesting in his Preface and less in his poetry. He found himself dissatisfied with the classical pastoral in view of his knowledge of the noble Scottish peasantry and their songs. Believing that the deeper workings of passionate emotion are to be found in country folk, he will attempt some sketches of Scottish rural life on a greater compass than is usual in pastoral poetry. He is further moved to do this because he feels that the Scottish peasantry is losing some of its greatness under the pressure of changed economic conditions, the sudden influx of wealth, and new ideas of education which train the head to the neglect of the heart. He hopes to add a trifle to the influence of Ramsay and Burns in giving permanency to the national character.

All this sounds promising. It might be a Scottish Wordsworth preparing the world for great things. But Hetherington has one important difference from Wordsworth aside from the lack of a creative imagination of a high order, and that is in his theory of poetic language. He gives his characters a speech more elevated than that of real life, on the ground that some degree of idealization is necessary to all poetry, and that a people who know and love the Bible, and many of them also Thomson, Young, and Milton, are not unfitly represented by an elevated speech. Hetherington could not see what Scott so finely expressed in his Preface to the *Antiquary*, that "the antique force and simplicity of their language, often tinged with the oriental eloquence of Scripture, in the mouths of those of elevated understanding, give pathos to their grief and dignity to their resentment." A perception of this would have saved Hetherington's poetry from some of its bookishness and sentimentality.

It cannot be said that the work of Patrick Brontë contributed anything of originality to the poetry of the English village. The name Brontë always commands attention, and one opens the book of these poems looking for something of the quality of perhaps *Wildfell Hall*. But it is not there. *Cottage Poems* (1811) are professedly religious in aim. The poet loves souls, and cottagers as

well as princes have immortal souls; Brontë considers the peasant always in his relation to spiritual and religious matters, not primarily in his human relations. He describes the cottage, the old cottager and his gentle daughter, their scanty fare, which he shares with them; he reports the edifying conversation they have together, and reflects upon the virtues of the pious poor. He writes in *Winter Night Meditations*:

“Peace to the man who stoops his head
To enter the most wretched shed;
Who with his condescending smiles
Poor diffidence and awe beguiles.”

Cottagers could hardly have said of Patrick Brontë what an old woman of the parish said of William Barnes to his daughter: “We do all love the passon, that we do, miss; he be so *plain*.” Brontë’s *Rural Minstrel* is a collection of descriptive and didactic poems, in which religion is the main theme. In *The Cottage in the Wood* (1815) Brontë takes two characters through life from youth to death, accompanying the prose story which recounts their history by a number of poems which deal with particular characters and events in the story, including epitaphs for the hero and heroine. In all these poems the people described are of no particular locality, and there is no portrayal of characteristic speech or customs. *The Maid of Killarney*, however, contains scenes specifically Irish, such as an Irish wake. As a whole, Brontë stands as a representative of religious verse dealing with the spiritual concerns of village folk. He adds nothing to our knowledge of their lives or our understanding of their character.

During the two decades through which this sketch has thus far carried us, 1800–1820, a goodly amount of attention was bestowed upon village people by writers whose work has now practically disappeared. Poems, sketches, romances, novels, are numerous listed in publishers’ catalogues under titles suggesting their nature. *The Happy Villager; a Poem*, by Rev. Richard Wallis; *The Distressed Village; a Poem*, by William Golden; *A Village Romance*, 2 volumes, by Jane Elson; *Village Anecdotes*, by

Elizabeth LeNoir; *The Village Fête*, a Burletta; *The Villager*, and other poems; *The Village Schoolmaster*, *The Village Poor House*, *The Cottage Muse*, *The Village Coquette*, a Novel in 3 volumes, by the Author of *Such is the World*—so the titles run. Toward the middle of the century the amount of poetry indicated by these lists appears to have declined, while that of prose fiction continued undiminished, though inferences drawn merely from titles and from lists that can not be exhaustive must be regarded as suggestive rather than conclusive. The evidence is sufficient, at any rate, to prove a strong interest in the village as literary material throughout the whole half-century. A particular activity manifests itself in the third decade, which began with the poems of Clare and ended with those of Ebenezer Elliott.

John Clare (1793-1864), peasant poet of Northamptonshire, is a much rarer spirit than Bloomfield. Son of hard-working laborers, himself an agricultural laborer all his life, improvident, utterly unequal to the battle of practical affairs, struggling with ill health that was the result of over hard toil and exposure, dying at last after twenty long years in a mad house,—personally he is one of the most pathetic and appealing figures in English literary history. His education was less than that of Bloomfield. He too made Thomson his patron saint. Having painfully saved up money to buy a copy of the Seasons he walked one day seven miles to the town to buy it, only to find that the day was Sunday (a fact that in his enthusiasm he had overlooked) and that the shops were closed. Returning the seven miles, he was up the next morning at sunrise, and on his way once more, this time to return with the precious volume under his arm, and to stop with it in a field under a hedge, where he read and read, oblivious of all mortal concerns. From an interested neighbor, a country gentleman with a fair library, Clare borrowed other books, and so increased the range of his acquaintance with poetry and fed his own poetic talent. His writing was not tenderly fostered within his own family. He used to write his poems on stray pieces of paper wherever he could get hold of it, stuffing them into a hole in

the cottage wall, from which his mother withdrew them to use as kindling for her fire.

But ignorance and hard life do not make a poet, however they may interest people in the man and his poetic attempts. And the poetry of Clare has much of imitation, not only of his beloved Thomson, but of Burns, and it has occasional offenses against taste, in the use of terms and of details; it does not rise into the higher reaches of imaginative insight. But it does have a remarkable delicacy and truth of observation, a freedom from all affectation of diction or style, an affectionate delight in the objects of nature and of human life familiar to him from every day contact. If without the highest power of suggestion, his poems have a sensibility to the beauty and charm of an ordinary English country landscape, with a perfect fidelity in the portraying of it, that renders it to the reader clearly, with its natural charm upon it.

The titles of Clare's volumes indicate the nature of his interests. *Poems, Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery*, appeared in 1820; *The Village Minstrel, and other Poems*, in 1821; *The Shepherd's Calendar, with Village Stories and other Poems*, 1827; and *The Rural Muse* in 1835. Nature is probably Clare's first interest, but the country folk he knew shared closely in it. His *Summer Evening*, beginning with a description of natural objects beheld in the glow of a late afternoon sun, passes on to the scenes on a farm when the laborers are returning from the fields; the youth lolls over the gate waiting for the milk-maid, hedgers plod along bending under their loads, wagons and plough horses, sheep and barking dogs fill the lanes and farm-yard,—it is all like a Troyon picture; and the poem continues with the scenes of later evening, when the workers are gathered outside their cottages to talk over crops and war news; Sue, the village gossip, lingers over her tales till summoned imperiously homeward by Dobson, her lord; and the poem ends with the poet going off to sleep to the drowsy sound of the night wind in the cotter's chimney. The poem is well conceived and is delightful in the fresh, unhackneyed treatment of its

material. The feeling in it is too sober, perhaps, to be called humor, but there is a quiet enjoyment of the lightly sketched figures of Sue and Dobson that is very attractive.

The Woodman presents a shivering winter scene. The Woodman rises at four in the morning, and after a scanty breakfast goes out to work in the woods till night. The description of his day throws an almost physical chill upon you as you read, and the contemplation of his poor little parcel of lunch does not serve to restore your comfort. The Woodman himself is less daunted by it all, and returns to his home at night cheerfully expectant of the enjoyment that awaits him there. *Rural Evening* describes a typical evening gathering of the villagers in their wonted places of meeting, and concludes with a pathetic picture of the parish cottage and a poor old woman standing at the door, looking on at the village pleasantness.

“And as to talk some passing neighbors stand,
And shove their box within her tottering hand,
She turns from echoes of her younger years,
And nips the portion of her snuff with tears.”

June deals with the topic of sheep-shearing. An old man, as he carries on his work of shearing, tells of his early days and the old celebrations, most of them now vanished. Here, and in the Christmas scenes of *December*, and in the harvest scenes of *The Harvest Morning*, Clare is picturing the village of his early remembrance, before the common was gone, and before the new relation between master and man as distinctively employer and employed had come into being. *June* is particularly happy in its account of the few picturesque customs still remaining to the Harvest Festival. For it still is merry, though the old freedom is gone,

“When masters made them merry with their men,
When all their coats alike were russet brown
And his rude speech was vulgar as their own—
All this is past, and soon will pass away
The time-torn remnants of the holiday.”

Clare's poetry was widely read for a time, at first under

the two-fold interest of curiosity and humanity, and then for its own sake, such an "inveterate old Londoner" as Charles Lamb finding himself made "free of the country" by Clare's poems. Then he was superseded by other things, and his long years of living burial began. The last cry from out this darkness—

"And yet I am—I live—though I am toss'd
 Into the nothingness of scorn and noise,
 Into the living sea of waking dream,
 Where there is neither sense of life, nor joys,
 But the huge shipwreck of my own esteem
 And all that's dear"—

is in its poignant beauty pitiful evidence of what, born in other circumstances and station, Clare might have been.

John Wilson, whose cordial appreciation of Clare in *Blackwood's* gave his last volume a wider circulation in Scotland than it had in England, and who was interested in the poetry of country life as of "that soil in which the native virtues of the English character grow," himself wrote a good deal, in prose and poetry, of the village. But those qualities of accurate realism which he so much admired in Bloomfield and Clare are not conspicuous in his own poems. He pictures a pleasant village scene of quiet beauty, with heavenward pointing spire and doves singing plaintively from the belfry; * he writes of a village desolated by a pestilence † with silent streets through which frightened children run, seeking refuge from the terrifying emptiness of their own plague-smitten house. The village appears in Wilson's verse invested with a romantic glow. It furnishes setting or atmosphere; it is not to him material for realistic presentation.

If Wilson may be taken as exemplifying the romantic strain in the poetry of the village at this time, the Ettrick Shepherd stands for the songs which, particularly in Scotland, are so large a part of the treatment of humble life. What the song and ballad had to contribute to an understanding of the peasant life of both England and Scotland has already appeared in this study, and it is

* *A Churchyard Scene.*

† *The Desolate Village.*

only necessary here to call attention to the fact that the contribution was still continuing. As to Hogg, if he had written less, our regard would perhaps be greater for what he gave us. But in the mass of it all a patient reader will discover many songs of delightful vigor and picturesqueness, affording lively pictures of the Scottish character and manner of life. *Donnybrook Fair*, published in the *Noctes Ambrosianæ* for 1826, is an instance. Hogg's *Winter Evening Tales*, collected among the cottages in the South of Scotland, 1820, won from Christopher North the verdict that they could not fail to "extend and strengthen his fame where he is most anxious that his genius and his name should live and flourish—among all the firesides of the cottagers of Scotland." Joanna Baillie's songs are among the well known and popular examples of the type.

How closely related to the poetry of nature is that of the village is seen in the work of William and Mary Howitt, whose *Forest Minstrel and Other Poems* was published in 1823. Their Preface indicates their aim in expressing their admiration for those "graphic delineations of actual life . . . which form one of the chief charms in our beautiful old bards; of which Keats and Hunt have given us some delightful instances, but which abound in all the freshness, the vigour, and the very essence of real existence, in every page of Wordsworth and Crabbe." The narrative of the title poem, *The Forest Minstrel*, is one of love and jealousy, of unbridled rage and death, such as Emily Brontë would have found congenial. But it is told without great emotional power and with unnecessary complications of characters and descriptions. Much more successful are those poems in which the pictorial aspect of things is presented; here Howitt sometimes attains a hint of the Wordsworth spirit, as in his *Epistle Dedicatory*, where he describes an old man leaning over the brook and culling healing herbs, or conveys the mood of dark autumn days with their comfortless winds and their brightness of cottage windows.*

* *Rural Life in England*, by William Howitt, 1838, and *Stories of English and Foreign Life*, by William and Mary Howitt, 1853, also contain tales of humble people.

A series of "*British Eclogues*" in *Blackwood's* for 1821 exhibits admirably the sentimental strain in the treatment of the village. They are the work of "Delta," or D. M. Moir, friend and biographer of John Galt. *Mary,—the Soldier's Bride* illustrates the kind. The lovers are separated first by war; then death claims the soldier, and Mary is overwhelmed with grief; at length she grows quiet; religion comes to be her only joy; she wastes away, and after a glorious vision of her lover awaiting her, at length dies. *The Broken Heart* presents a girl dying because deserted by a false lover. The theme of a beautiful maiden suffering death after a slow decline is not a new one; Gay made it the theme of his Thursday eclogue under the title *A Dirge*, early in the eighteenth century, and it has appeared often in poem and prose tale. The young man of high sensibility has sometimes served as the subject of the sketch, but in the main—at least in this later period—the appeal is that of the frail girl who sinks away out of life, not always because of a great grief, but often from physical causes. The insidious disease which modern society combats by societies and other propaganda growing out of an understanding of its real nature, was to an earlier age one of the most mysterious visitations of God, and in the "decline" so often pictured by poets there was a very natural appeal. Unfortunately there was also opportunity for a false sentimentality, which Gay was prompt to satirize, and to which Tennyson fell victim in his *May Queen*.

In very different vein was another series in *Blackwood's* of 1820–1821, under the heading *Sketches of Village Life and Character*, and still another in 1822 called *Sketches of Scottish Character*, both by "Juvenalis Junior." These are realistic and satirical, and their author vies with the chronicler of Spoon River in the success with which he unearths the sordid and unlovely in the community he is sketching. Some of the satire is undoubtedly directed at the current literary treatment of the particular scenes described. For example, there is *The Village Funeral*, by way of comparison with the sentimental poems just discussed. The "village maid" dies in a "decline" on the eve of her

wedding day; the invited guests assemble and attend mournfully to the service as the minister conducts it, and upon its conclusion whisper together with renewed freedom; they convey the body to the grave; at length the village dames betake themselves to share "the female grief and female *pint*" in lamentations over Jenny, "and fuddle all their senses in her praise." This is clearly in revulsion from the sentimental type of thing, and is almost as unlike Gay, for Gay wrote in good humored burlesque, while this is hard and cynical. All three are far enough from Wordsworth's profound sense of the awfulness of life, his consciousness of the bond of brotherhood, when he beholds the reverent bearing of the dead on the shoulders of "the next in love" from church to churchyard, strong men advancing together with "firm unhidden faces." * It was not given to many poets to witness such scenes as this, which were passing away even from the remote regions in which Wordsworth knew them, but surely men did not yet see the whole truth of their own village life, if sentimentality or cynicism or gay burlesque was all they felt in the face of the great final experience.

The Village Wedding in the Juvenalis series is a scene of riot; it begins with excitement throughout the village, as villagers, dressed in their best, assemble. The dance is described, with the growing noise and boisterous lawlessness. One such wedding night, with all its tipsy fun, undoes any amount of moral and religious training. *The Village Sabbath* is very close to that described by Crabbe in *The Village*: the villagers are sunk in *rest* (no church service, as with Crabbe); they get up late, and loaf about, gossiping and drinking; lack of occupation means disaster, and Eliza, a lovely girl of eighteen, pays for her share in it with her virtue. The picture carries one back farther than Crabbe, to Somerville's *Hobbinol*.

The series constitutes a gallery of individual portraits, with, as might be expected, few attractive figures. There is the apothecary who nightly harangues the villagers who congregate in his shop on the evils of the day: he

* *The Excursion*, Book II, *The Solitary*.

advocates "equality" and rails against princes, lords, wealth, power, and against priests, who only gull, not teach, men; all the group assembled join him in grinding their teeth and cursing.* There is the young bully, only late escaped from school himself, now turned schoolmaster and reveling in the infliction of the cruelty he has suffered.† There is the cobbler, sitting at work in the midst of his sordid, filthy household; when he is tired of listening to his wife, scolding and beating the child, he lays his strap around her shoulders and expeditiously shuts her up.‡ There are the minister in the Established Church, who toadies to his patron,§ and the dissenting minister, who toadies to the villagers on whom his living is dependent.|| The woman of shrill, piercing voice who keeps her husband in bondage¶ is matched with the patient endurer of a drunken husband's abuse;** the poet suggests that fate has made a mistake in not mating the smith with the tailor's wife! The "Dying Villager" passes out of life under the tortures of a guilty conscience and in the terror of hell fire, while the old packman can not be frightened by his exhorters, as he lies dying, but flippantly assures them:

"All this is most unlikely—ay depen'
On large allowances for trading men." ††

It is only fair to mention also Sutor John, the hearty villager who delighted and excelled in the games of the village, now dead and lamented; Adam Harkness, the old shepherd, who goes back in reminiscences to the days of '93, and his loyalty to his king, his country, and his God; and Willie Herdman, the old soldier, in whose honor the poet quotes Goldsmith,

* *The Village Politician.*

† *The Village Schoolmaster.*

‡ *The Village Cobbler.*

§ *Father Sycophant.*

|| *Jedediah.*

¶ *The Tailor's Wife.*

** *The Smith's Wife.*

†† *Mungo Clark, the South Country Packman.*

"And all thy *failings* lean'd to virtue's side."

Herdman was a devoted angler, and the sport is praised as one that attunes the heart to solitude and God. Even Rob, the village wit, is a fellow of parts and of great willingness to oblige his neighbors,—he could fiddle and flute, play quoits, write letters for such of his neighbors as did not take kindly to the use of the pen, advise on sales, and so on; but he had no stability, disappointed his customers, and at length "absconded, listed, crossed the Stygian shore."

This remarkable study of a village community stands out quite distinctly from other things of its time in its cynical realism. There can be little doubt that it is at least in part a reaction from a prevailing sentimentality; yet Crabbe's faithful, stern portrayal had been made, and Clare was even then presenting his sympathetic but equally truthful picture. A particular locality and a personal experience of a kind to produce an embittered spirit must have contributed their share of incentive. Although the time was one of very general hardship among villagers, and society was full of measures for relief, and discussion of causes, and criticism of men in high place as responsible for conditions, there is in this series of sketches practically no hint of any such general interest; it is all personal and local.

In 1829 William Lisle Bowles, now growing old but writing on with a pleasant persistence and finding an audience for his verse, published *Days Departed, or Banwell Hill*. The title suggests a *Grongar Hill—Pleasures of Memory* type of poem, and quite correctly. It is a long, loosely built poem, in five parts, two of which concern the village. Part II is reminiscent and didactic; Part III is a narrative, quite independent in matter and form of the rest of the poem. This narrative need not detain us. It is a tale of superstitious fear, of the terror and remorse of a guilty conscience, such as Crabbe might have told powerfully. Bowles allows it to become diffuse and weak. The poet of the gentle sonnets could not make of himself a teller of stern tales. Part II is more interesting because

of its connection with affairs. It begins with recollections of the poet's childhood, of his mother and of his father, the village pastor. This leads him into the reflection that villages now are not as they were in that early day. In the village of his memory (Bowles was born in 1762) the tiller of the soil labored with independence in look and heart, and would have disdained a parish dole. His children learned to read, his daughter walked content and innocent and lovely. But now,—

“Now mark this scene!
The fuming factory's polluted air
Has stained the country!”

The moral difference typified by this change he marks by two contrasting scenes, that of a betrayed girl, receiving her weekly eighteen pence of parish pay shamelessly, in the presence of her faithless lover who stands aloof with clownish leer, and that of the village maid whose sin, the consequence of betrayed love, has overwhelmed her with confusion and sadness. Many poems and stories of village life present scenes of the second type; Crabbe has both; and Harriet Martineau's story of *The Parish* has the first in its most sordid aspect.

This poverty and degradation Elliott, writing of the same things in the same year, attributed to the “bread-tax”; Harriet Martineau, some years later, to a general system of mismanagement in which the poor laws played the chief part. Bowles recognized three causes. First of all, the growth of manufacturing. The factories, he says, have silenced the wheel in the vale; each huge vomitory of smoke is a “steam engine of crime”; poverty drives the young girl to toil all day with rude and ribald clowns in the fields, till she loses all her natural modesty. A second cause of ill conditions is “pauper-pay,” but Bowles does not dwell upon this as he does upon the third cause, that of “perverted religion,” that is to say, “Calvinistic and contentious creeds.” Evangelical religion becomes the object of his attack through a considerable proportion of Part II, which he concludes with a picture of a crowd of

village children being taught the ways of right living on the parsonage lawn.*

When it is recalled that 1830 was the year of the Peasants' Uprising, the last desperate stand that agricultural laborers in various parts of England made in defense of their right to live and labor and enjoy some fair—or even small—portion of the fruit of their toil, and when the fierceness and persistence of that struggle, and the tragedies of death and exile following its defeat, are remembered, it will seem natural enough that poets and prose writers dealing with village people should have been so concerned at this time with the distresses of their lives. They did not agree as to explanation or remedy, any more than the twentieth century knows what to do with the situation involved in Galsworthy's *Justice*, or Gibson's poems of labor, or than we in America know how to explain or to change into love the hate of I. W. W. and Capital. The introduction of machinery, the increase of commerce, the greed of capital, the perversity of labor,—such explanations are too simple and easy to explain anything adequately. John Wilson, writing in *Blackwood's* for February, 1830, in criticism of the poem of Bowles, remarked that a perfectly full and fair estimate of the influence of the commercial and manufacturing spirit on the character of the people was yet a desideratum in moral and political philosophy. He did not look for it from a poet, however; a poet of necessity takes one side, and in this case he hopes has colored it too darkly. But his subject is nevertheless one "of paramount interest to the statesman who loves his country and his kind." †

* This last scene is drawn from his own experience: his *Villager's Verse Book* is the repository of the verses which he composed for the purpose of impressing upon children a love of natural scenes combined with the feelings of piety and religion.

† Wilson's fear of one-sidedness in Bowles is a little surprising in the light of an interesting essay of his own of January, 1830. In it he discusses the changed conditions and hence the changed character of the population, and especially the commercialising of agriculture, as a result of which old relations and local attachments, with the old affectionate bond between higher and lower classes, are broken up. Now a man traffics in himself. Formerly he would not,—really could not—leave his own village, but now he moves about and sells his labor in the

"It is the glory of much of the best poetry of this age," said Wilson, "that while full of imagination, it yet deals with man's homeliest interests." That this fact about poetry should have been considered one of its chief glories, is evidence of how far the literary world had gone in the process of democratization which we studied in its inception in the preceding chapter. The movement toward a naturalistic study of human life was in full swing by 1830. In its development many humble poets, to whose self-expression the romantic spirit was favorable, had played an important part. Some of these are now forgotten and survive only in chance, stray pieces. Certain others, more considerable poets in their own day, are still known to all students of literature if not to its general readers.

The middle of the century saw the village theme in the hands of two poets the lesser of whom did, perhaps, on the whole a higher service to the village than his greater contemporary. They were Tennyson, and William Barnes, the Dorset poet.

It is even more true in the case of Tennyson than in that of Wordsworth that a consideration of his village poetry brings into review the less significant and characteristic of his work. Yet it involves a few of the best known of his poems, and illustrates certain aspects of his taste and his art. From his early years in a tiny country hamlet Tennyson had known the English village, and the impressions it had made upon him through the days of his youth come out in rare beauty in unobtrusive suggestion here and there:

"The time draws near the birth of Christ,
The moon is hid, the night is still;
The Christmas bells from hill to hill
Answer each other in the mist."

market for money. Poor laws, by which, in nearly a third of England, laborers are paid half their wages out of the rates, are clearly a degrading influence. Wilson puts well his conclusion, that as a result of all this many things are gone, and among them "that cordial and endearing spirit that gladdened the face of every day's life, and was sunshine upon merry England."—*Education of the People, Blackwood's*, Jan. 1830.

From this wholly incidental but perfect allusion—scarcely more belonging to a particular time and place than Shakespeare's

"Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,"—

to the full length portrait of a thoroughly English farmer, speaking the dialect of his own shire, Tennyson's treatment of the village ranges. The claim of the rustic grew upon Tennyson's interest, for his most thoroughly rustic pieces lie beyond the mid-century. We may press the limits of this study sufficiently to take these also into consideration.

In *The May Queen* * Tennyson employed an old theme, not escaping altogether the sentimentality long attaching to it, but greatly refining and elaborating it. The old village festival of May is combined with the idea of a girl sinking into an untimely death, and the narrative is written in the first person. In no former poem has the thing been given this subjective tone: there is a sophistication about it, and an elaborateness of form and adornment, quite new to the theme. Still further removed from the usual simply told, objective story is the *Miller's Daughter*, † with its lyric element and its tone of introspection, its delicately wrought descriptions and its communing of spirit with spirit. The story that lies back of it is the old King Cophetua one, but the narrative is incidental to the emotional experience it involves. Incidental too are the picture of the portly miller, with his slow, wise smile, his twinkling grey eyes, and his healthy, sound, clear nature, and the picture of the village lights and the old mansion looking down on the village spire. In *Dora* ‡ we have a "pastoral tale" which never could have been written in the old days of the pastoral. It has Miss Mitford in its immediate background, and a long succession of poems and stories, more or less good, back of that. Its story of stern hardness, of a narrow, stubborn sense of duty finally broken by the force of grief and love, is too well known for further remark.

* 1833.

† 1833.

‡ 1842.

Enoch Arden, *The Grandmother*, *The Northern Cobbler*, *Owd Roa*, all furnish evidence of Tennyson's appreciation of sturdy, simple souls in humble life. *The Village Wife*; or, *The Entail*, is one of the best, with its garrulous, gossipy, not wholly loyal and kindly village woman passing judgment on the old squire and his family as the new squire comes into residence. But incomparably the best piece of character drawing from rustic life that Tennyson did was his *Northern Farmer, Old Style*. As a "vivid piece out of the great comedy of man," a "superbly hewn piece of rough and vital sculpture," as Stopford Brooke pronounced it, it is unchallenged. And nowhere, not even in Wordsworth, is there to be found so striking an expression of the old feeling of the English farmer for the sanctity and the supreme claim of the land. In the *Northern Farmer, New Style*, this feeling is represented as superseded by an ambition for personal wealth. But it is something elemental; it is a natural product of the soil, and cannot be killed out permanently. In Mr. Galsworthy's *Freelands* even Lord Mallory exhibits it in some degree, and Tod Freeland has it ideally. Although Tennyson does not care here for its historical significance, it was in fact one of the elements in the nature of the English countryman which had made most tragic the uprooting of fifty or seventy-five years earlier.

In a very different sense from Tennyson was William Barnes the poet of village life. He pictures the rural life of Dorset, indoors and out, by the cottage fireside, in the fields, in the village street; he shows the people at work and play; he writes of their superstitions, their traditions, their games, their practical jokes, their religion; he presents some of their difficulties in the face of economic conditions. And all this he does in their own speech, and with an affectionate appreciation, a truthfulness, and a quiet humor that made the poems the greatest delight to the people they depicted. Barnes used to read his poetry before audiences of laughing and applauding Dorset folk.

The whole life of Barnes was in reality a pastoral performance of the greatest possible charm. But it was more than that, for he was a man of tastes and talents

that carried him out of the circle of his own little community into remote lands and far distant times. He was self-educated, having left school at thirteen. But before he had finished his own training he had made of himself a schoolmaster, a parson, a philologist, an antiquarian, a naturalist, an amateur musician, and rather more than an amateur engraver. He tried his hand, not very successfully, at drama; he wrote essays in political economy somewhat in the vein of Ruskin; he interested himself in Workingmen's Institutes; and with it all he discharged with the utmost fidelity his duties as schoolmaster and clergyman. His talents were too many to make him supreme in any one; but the sum total of his performances is astonishing and the quality of much of his work of a very high order.

The life and personality of such a man tempt one to linger over them. The outstanding facts of his career can be quickly given, but his flavor, his strongly individual nature tinged with an eccentricity as harmless and endearing as that of Dr. Primrose himself—whom indeed he resembles in more than this regard—this can be less quickly communicated, yet is more important as explanatory of his poetry.

Barnes was born (1801) in Blackmore valley, a place of "an easy rustic life of good will and fellowship," as his daughter and biographer* phrases it. After his brief schooling he went into a lawyer's office as clerk, leaving it in 1823 to become a schoolmaster in Wiltshire. He married in 1827, establishing at this time a boarding school of his own. During this period he was reading widely, and was growing keenly interested in language as a science. He studied the Dorset dialect carefully, and became keenly alive to its capabilities as a poetic medium. "A broad and bold shape of the English language," as the Doric was of the Greek, he considered it to be "rich in humor, in raillery and hyperbole, and altogether as fit a vehicle of rustic feeling and thought as the Doric is found in the *Idyllia* of Theocritus." To this conviction,

* Lucy Barnes Baxter (Leader Scott, pseud.).

and to a certain pride of inheritance in this speech, which he believed to be a separate off-shoot of the Anglo-Saxon tongue and purer and more regular than the national language, we owe the poems in the Dorset dialect. How great the debt is, one need only read these by the side of the same writer's poems in pure English to discover. Undoubtedly the dialect, never made familiar to any large public, has meant a limitation of Barnes's audience, but it as certainly has meant a heightened admiration from the "few but fit" readers of his verse.

After Barnes had shown his sympathetic interest in the laborer by certain prose papers,—*Leniency to Criminals*, for example,—he began writing his dialect poems, printing them in the *Dorset County Chronicle*, without any thought of their ever going beyond the west of England. They soon began to attract attention, and a reviewer in the *Gentleman's Magazine* spoke of them quaintly as poems where the "sweet pastoral spirit graces both the grave and gay, and the rustic Muse is pure as the atmosphere of the downs on which she is indigenous."

The first collected volume of them appeared in 1844, and was quickly successful. The poems were warmly praised not only for their poetic value, but for their power to lead "landlords and upper classes . . . to a more intimate acquaintance with the feelings and habits of the poor,—to a more sincere sympathy with their wants and hopes, and their homely and household prejudices, which are far too frequently violated and despised." No conscious moral purpose inspired the poems; Barnes declared that he wrote them, so to say, as if he could not help it, as mere refreshment of mind. Yet the social needs which led to such an appraisal of his work are clearly reflected within the poems, and approval on this basis must have met a welcome from the poet.

Barnes returned to Dorset in 1835, to open a private school, and in Dorset he spent the rest of his life. Conceiving an ambition to take orders, he entered himself in 1837 at St. John's College, Cambridge, as a "ten years man," was ordained Priest in 1848, and received the degree of B. D. in 1850. This long, hard pull over, he

gave himself to his pet hobby, philology, and in 1854 published an elaborate Philological Grammar.*

In the years that followed Barnes became the friend of Coventry Patmore, of Tennyson,† of William Allingham, Dr. Furnivall, and Francis Palgrave. Thomas Hardy, who lived near the Rectory at Came, brought Edmund Gosse to see him, and the young poet and the old became warm friends. As to Hardy, different as his work is from that of Barnes, one can readily believe that the younger man's perception of the charms of the Wessex peasantry was quickened by the sympathetic enjoyment which Barnes had in them. Barnes's spirit was well-nigh unquenchable: in his last days, at the age of eighty-five, he talked poetry with Gosse and Hardy, and Anglo-Saxon roots with linguistic friends, dictated leaflets for the laborers of his parish, and composed two poems of amazing youthfulness and charm. The sanity and wholesomeness of such a man's outlook upon life, the sweetness and dignity of his nature, must shine through his poetry. His portrayal of village people and affairs may be expected to be free from either sentimentality or cynicism, and to show a warm humanity that accepts people as they are and finds them good.

It is impossible to give any adequate impression of poetry like that of Barnes, in its unfamiliar medium, by a brief description of it. His stanza forms are varied, and his effects of refrain, of hidden rhyme, of queer old Persian forms unearthed in his linguistic researches, are innumerable. He writes lyrics, dramatic monologues, descrip-

* A sort of Luther Burbank among philologists, Barnes allowed his personal whims to nullify much of the value of really scholarly and original work. He labored with missionary zeal to Saxonize the English language, and substituted for accepted notation of Latin origin an elaborate system of his own in Saxon terms, which both puzzled and antagonized other students of the subject. Dr. Primrose did not defend his favorite doctrine of monogamy more ardently—or stubbornly—than did Barnes his of a Saxon English. He chose failure for his work to be a betrayal of his cause.

† His daughter believed, on the basis of remarks which she remembered her father to have made, that the *Northern Farmer* was written after a visit from Barnes to Tennyson. and in the attempt to test the northern dialect as a poetic medium comparable with that of the south.

tive verse, narratives, eclogues. He is often serious in tone and distinctly moral, but there is neither dulness nor patronage in his moralizing. His mood, varying from the serene and gentle to the gay, even the jolly, is pre-vaillingly cheerful.

He writes on *The Shepherd of the Farm*, or *The Sheep Bwoy*, suggesting the life of the farm from this angle. Or of *Bob the Fiddler*, who is the center of all the best festivity of the village:

"Oh! Bob the fiddler is the pride
O' chaps an' maidens vur an' wide;
They can't keep up a merry tide,
But Bob is in the middle.
If merry Bob do come avore ye,
He'll zing a zong, or tell a story;
But if you'd zee en in his glory,
Jist let en have a fiddle."

He shows community activities, not merely of the old threshing and shearing, but of others,—*A-haulen o' the Corn*, *A-nutten*, and *Teäken in Apples*. Robert Frost's solitary apple-picker, remembering as he drowzes off to sleep at night, the pressure of the ladder-rung under his feet and the sight of apples upon apples, on tree and in barrel, seems lonesome enough in contrast. In Dorset it was a social occasion:

"An' there wer Liz so proud an' prim,
An' dumpy Nan, an' Poll so sly,
An' dapper Tom, an' loppen Jim,
An' little Dick, an' Fan, an' I."

And what these apple-pickers saw last before their sleep that night was apples slily shaken down on the backs of stooping maidens, Tom jumping in a bag, Fan "carried all roun'" in a basket, and various other diverting pranks. Indeed, practical jokes are numerous in the poems and contribute not a little to the impression of content and happiness among the people.

There are love poems of the sort that seem to belong to such people as these. In *Jenny's Ribbons* the lover ("Jenny's young man" strikes one as a more suitable term)

recounts how Jenny asked him to choose what ribbons she should wear to the fair. He considers them all, the brown, the red, the green,—but

“She had woone blue to match her eyes,
The colour o’ the zimmer skies,
An’ thik, though I do like the rest,
Is he that I do like the best,
Because she had en in her heär
When vu’st I walk’d wi’ her at feär.”

And so, “her han’ ’ithin my elbow crook,” they started off,

“The while her mother, at the geäte,
Call’d out an’ bid her not stay leäte,
An’ she, a-smilin wi’ her bow
O’ blue, look’d roun’ an’ nodded, No.”

Meary Wedded is a rustic *Fair Inez*, while the eclogue *A Bit o’ Sly Coorten* is a delightful stolen meeting, with a quarrel, some harsh words, a few tears, a quite satisfactory making up, and a final quick scamper as someone is seen coming toward the stile.

Evenen, an’ Maidens out at Door has a long lingering line and a note of pensiveness suggestive of Tom Moore. *Evenen in the Village* is a little idyll of two stanzas with the feeling of evening quiet in a village perfectly caught in it; the light of the west has turned to gloom, the wind is still, the house-dogs bark,—Jemmy the smith has just gone down the lane with his flute;

“An’ the flickeren light drough the window-peäne
Vrom the candle’s dull fleäme do shoot,
An’ young Jemmy the smith is a-gone down leäne,
A-playen his shrill-vaiced flute,
An’ the miller’s man
Do zit down at his ease
On the seat that is under the cluster o’ trees,
Wi’ his pipe an’ his cider can.”

The fact that Barnes could never be persuaded (except once) to write a poem for the sake of promoting a cause, that none of his poems was written “with a drift,” gives especial significance to his few poems dealing with current

questions and the difficulties which were pressing upon agricultural people in his neighborhood. In *The 'lotments* John and Richard, the one possessed of an allotment and the other not, converse over the advantages of having land of one's own. They agree that it is a great safeguard against the workhouse. John finishes up with the remark,

"I'd keep myzelf from parish, I'd be bound,
If I could get a little patch o' ground."

In *The Common a-took in* John, on his way to market to sell his geese, is overtaken by Thomas, who wonders at his course; John explains that now the common is to be taken in he must sell not only his geese but his little cow. They discuss the advantages of living near a common; Thomas has heard of allotment schemes in some places, but John is skeptical:

Thomas: " 'Tis handy to live near a common;
But I've a-zeed, an' I've a-zaid,
That if a poor man got a bit o' bread,
They'll try to teäke it vrom en.
But I wer twold back tother day,
That they be got into a way
O' letten bits o' groun' out to the poor.

John: Well, I do hope 'tis true, I'm sure;
An' I do hope that they will do it here,
Or I must goo to workhouse, I do fear."

The grasping of land by greedy farmers is the theme of *Two Farms in Woone*, which gives the picture of Tennyson's *New Style Northern Farmer* from the point of view of the peasant victim of his greed. Barnes's tone is perfectly impartial. The eclogue form, indeed, admits of no comment, but the words of the speakers themselves are sufficient to reveal the poet's recognition of those evils of the day which were pressing upon Dorset laborers, and are at the same time skillfully suggestive of the unexpressiveness of men accustomed to take what comes, good or bad.

When Barnes began his writing of poetry, the crisis

of 1830, in which the Dorset laborers had a share, was only recently over. The Corn Laws were not to be repealed for some fifteen years more, and the process of enclosure was continuing, with its inevitable hardships to the cottager and small landowner. Barnes was interested in all these things and concerned himself practically with them.* The fact that he nevertheless gives them so little prominence in his poetry, is significant in the history of the poetry of village life. From the beginning of the century to the work of Tennyson and Barnes the psychological and æsthetic motive was steadily coming to dominate. The social motive was supreme in Elliott, strong in Crabbe (though less so in his later poems than in the *Village*), and appeared as more or less prominent in various minor writers. But in Wordsworth, Bloomfield, Clare, the Scottish song writers, and most periodical and fugitive verse, it was the secondary interest. It remains to see how the prose of the period followed the same drift.

* He was unsympathetic with the Chartists and his one poem "with a drift," *The Times*, shows both his distrust of this movement, and his active sympathy with the grievances of the people.

CHAPTER VI

THE VILLAGE IN PROSE, 1800-1850

Thus far in the history of village literature, prose has played a subordinate part. It has held the promise of a rich development, but the first natural medium for a subject so close to the pastoral and to the poetry of nature seems to have been verse rather than prose. The novels of Richardson and Fielding are of the country, and Goldsmith's *Vicar* involves village life without expressly treating it. The Roger de Coverley papers are a forecast of Washington Irving and Miss Mitford. But all this promise lay still undeveloped at the opening of the new century. Prose had been employed in the treatment of the village theme largely by reformers and propagandists, in works that lie only on the borderland of literature. As the transforming power of the Romantic spirit made itself felt, however, in prose, a little later but no less completely than in poetry, the village entered into a new literary life, which held in store for it undreamed-of possibilities in novel, essay, and short story. Since the most characteristic of this new village prose does not develop much before 1820 and is only on the eve of its best development at the conclusion of the period here under consideration, its story is a much shorter one than that of village poetry.

The practical interest in village affairs which expressed itself partly in writings that lie outside the bounds of pure literature has already been noted as strong in this period.* Some of this work, which found its natural medium in prose, should receive consideration here, either because of its intrinsic quality, or because it reflects the public attitude toward village life and is an important background for the more purely literary treatment of the subject.

* See ante, p. 159.

For propagandist purposes the dialogue had already approved itself. Hannah More's *Village Politics* (1792) had combated French revolutionary theories in dialogue form. In 1806 the Rev. Rowland Hill published his *Village Dialogues*, whose chief concern is religious. Hill * represents the evangelical movement in religion, and his dialogues are mainly concerned with the state of the church and clergy of the day. Most of the speakers are country clergymen, who discuss various questions of character and conduct among rural people. More interest is to be found in Hill's *Journal of a Tour through the North of England and Parts of Scotland*, in such passages as that on country fairs, for example, where Hill describes the displays of shop goods which have intruded upon the legitimate activities of fairs for cattle and the productions of husbandry, and laments the revelry that now marks these once innocent and useful occasions.

A more interesting character is the author of *The Cottage Fireside*, and *The Young South Country Weaver*, the Rev. Henry Duncan,† editor of the paper to which Carlyle made his first contributions, friend of Carlyle, of Robert Owen ("before his infidelity was flagrant," says Duncan's careful biographer), of James Grahame, and of Sir David Brewster, and originator of the movement for the establishment of Savings Bank for the country poor. Like a modern minister in an American rural charge, who serves the good of his people through the Farmers' Grange, the agricultural department of the university, the Good Roads Commission, as well as by base ball clubs, libraries, literary societies, and church meetings, Henry Duncan founded and fostered Friendly Societies, saw through Parliament his own measure for the establishment of Savings Banks for the benefit of the country poor, published *The Scottish Chief Repository* in imitation of Hannah More's series, worked in his Parish School, instituted

* 1744-1833. Preacher of Surrey Chapel, South London. In 1790 he published a Hymn Book which he had first sent anonymously to Cowper for corrections. See Cowper's letter to him March 29, 1790. Wright ed., vol. III, p. 450.

† 1774-1846.

Sunday conversational lectures to educate his people in matters of science, started a parish library, and wrote stories and tracts. Incidentally it is to be assumed that he preached and conducted services. Pure literature is hardly to be expected of him. His *Cottage Fireside*, however, goes back to his unregenerate—that is to say, unevangelical—days, when the apprehension of a French invasion was exciting the countryside and the young Duncan, romantic and glowing with physical vitality, adopted the Highland garb and made a Peter the Hermit of himself, going about the country to fortify the people for a stand against the threatening foe. The *Young South Country Weaver* is soberer, and belongs more strictly to the world of industry, since it aimed to expose the fallacious political views which were being disseminated among the manufacturing classes by ignorant or designing demagogues.

Duncan's work is compared by a reviewer in the *Quarterly* with the better known *Cottagers of Glenburnie*, of Mrs. Eliza Hamilton.* The latter is a tale designed for moral instruction, and was part of a design to promote industry among the lower orders of Scottish women. Its characters are vividly drawn, and its dialogue lively and full of the flavor of homely talk. It is regarded as giving a faithful and admirable picture of the manners of a large class of the Scottish peasantry.† Mary Leadbeater's *Cottage Dialogues among the Irish Peasantry* ‡ is pronounced by Maria Edgeworth in the Preface which she contributes to the book, to contain an exact representation of the manner of being of the lower Irish, and a literal transcript of their language, so that if it were to be discovered ages hence in an Irish Herculaneum it would better reward the finder than many Greek manuscripts have rewarded their finders in the old Herculaneum. This, to be sure, attributes to the book a value rather historical

* 1808.

† A writer in *Blackwood's* for May, 1821, reviewing Galt's *Annals of the Parish*, mentions *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* as relating to a period "forty or fifty years ago." The tale itself does not call attention to the time concerned.

‡ 1810.

than literary, but the simple little sketches are in reality not without some skill in portraiture and in the presentation of situation and incident.

Harriet Martineau's tale, *The Parish*, was published in 1832 as No. 1 in a series of tracts issued "under the superintendence of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge." The propagandist nature of the book is evident in it, in spite of its careful construction as a story and its portrayal of characters that are rather more than lay figures for the "diffusion of knowledge." It gathers up into one narrative the whole situation which resulted from the events of a half-century in country life. No one who is interested to get a concrete and comprehensive view of that development can dispense with the reading of this little book. Its chief object of attack is the system of poor-laws, but this is so inwrought with various other factors of country affairs that the view the book affords is not confined to this one aspect. Especially telling is its presentation of the degeneration of character among the country poor under the administration of this mistaken system, a degeneration attested by Elliott, Crabbe, and sundry other writers. It should perhaps be said that although all the circumstances presented in the story are substantiated by the author's own observation and knowledge, yet they are of course so selected as to bear out one idea, and therefore doubtless involve some distortion of the actual truth. Miss Martineau's *Deerbrook* is her one attempt at a really literary treatment of village life. It is only partly successful, since the reformer could not wholly lose herself in the artist, and had no strong vein of humor or of poetry.

No work of a half literary, half practical character compares in interest or value with that of William Cobbett. It is impossible to give it here the consideration that it asks by virtue of its own attractiveness. His *Rural Rides*, the first series of which appeared in 1830, is a mass of close description and keen comment, containing, together with Cobbett's particular economic theory and program for English rural life, a remarkable picture of the southern country of his "rides." Some of his

pictures of the country, its people, its old churches reminiscent of a happier and more prosperous past,* are as delightful as his passages of vigorous argument or fiery eloquence are compelling.

His *Cottage Economy*, 1821,† has no less interest, and is more directly concerned with the welfare of villagers of the humblest sort, in their own homes. In this little work Cobbett was trying, by teaching a particular type of household management, to counteract some of the evils that had come upon country people in the wake of industrialism. He would restore the old household self-sufficiency,—would have each household bake its own bread, brew its own beer, grow its own mustard, even, and keep its own stock. As Chesterton points out in his Introduction, Cobbett was attempting to revive mediæval England,—or for the more immediate purpose of politics, rural England. “He believed,” says Chesterton, “that agricultural labour could pay; he even entertained the Quixotic fancy that it might pay the agricultural labourer.” To this end he saw the cottager as “master of his cottage,” for he understood that thrift can only come with property and with freedom. Cobbett had no patience with the cant of his day that advocated a “happy poverty.” “I despise the man that is *poor and contented*,” said he. But by poverty he meant real *want*, an “insufficiency of the food and raiment and lodging necessary to health and decency.” That nine out of ten people in a nation should live in such poverty, and be contented to live in it, he considered degrading to human nature.

Cobbett prefaces his specific directions for brewing, bread-making, the keeping of cows, pigs, and geese, the making of rush-lights, etc., by a statement of his general position. He would have the way open for every laborer to rise, but he would have him understand that progress

* Cobbett estimated by the seating capacity of a church in comparison with the population of the neighborhood in his day the amount of depopulation the region had suffered. This practical interest did not keep him from an enjoyment of the great beauty of these fine old churches.

† Reprinted, 1916, by Douglas Pepler, London, with an Introduction by G. K. Chesterton.

must be gradual, and that the path by which the descendants of the laborer become gentlemen is a steep and long one. The state of the laborer has its own advantages in the absence of tormenting ambition and of many of the causes of ill health; but real poverty neutralizes these advantages. "*Want*, horrid want, is the great parent of crime," he says. "It is given to but few men to be gentle and good humoured amidst the various torments attendant on pinching poverty." In the better days that seemed to be dawning for laborers as he wrote, he hoped that they would secure for themselves and their children the happy estate of their forbears by sensible living and wise education.

It is a part of Cobbett's charm that his views were colored by a lively prejudice and a heat of feeling that led him into the most vigorous and picturesque of writing. For example, he entertained great scorn for the potato—that "villainous root," "Ireland's lazy root,"—as a chief article of food, and wrote of it with energy. He speaks of "the slovenly and beastly habits engendered amongst the labouring classes by constantly lifting their principal food at once out of the earth to their mouths,"—a process too easy to be quite befitting the dignity of man! His strictures on tea-drinking are amusing, with their scornful references to the "everlasting dawdling about with the slops of the tea tackle," but his objection to the substitution of bread and bad tea for a breakfast of bread and beer and bacon is sensible. "A good man will be contented fast enough," he says, "if he be fed and clad sufficiently; but if a man be not well fed and clad, he is a base wretch to be contented."

It would be unprofitable to follow through the period all those productions which lie on the border line of literature. It is enough to be aware of their existence as evidence of the kind of interest which the village was arousing in practical life. In many ways its affairs were handled anything but wisely, but there was no longer a general ignorance or indifference concerning it. Its religious, educational, political, and economic interests were all the subject of investigation and discussion, and

the literature of village life stands out against the background of this general interest.

We are met at the outset of the century by a novelist whose work stands apart both from the romantic movement and from all lines of interest in the village which we have yet encountered, Jane Austen. "Three or four families in a country village is the very thing to work on," she said, and the words indicate clearly the nature of her liking for the village, for a village "family" is of course not a group of peasant kin, but of landowning people and the smaller country gentry. Middle-class life in the country is her theme, and the village is rather taken for granted in her novels than made an object of particular attention. There is not a work-house or a cruel Justice or an enclosure on her horizon, nor is there an idyllic picture of peasant family life, with rose-covered cottages and toddling "wee things," or a suggestion of an almost mystically close relation between land and laborer. We walk to the village with Kitty and Lydia to visit an aunt who is conveniently located in the neighborhood of an interesting detachment of red-coats; we ride into Highbury for a morning call upon Miss Bates, and in the course of our call learn innumerable items of importance concerning the butcher and the doctor and other people of the village; we associate with country parsons who have all possible leisure to be as entertaining as their natural equipment of mind and person will permit; we go strawberrying, attend country balls, engage in private theatricals, play endless whist and drink unlimited tea; and we distribute clothing and gruel to the poor and sick of the community. Middle class people, as the aimlessness and isolation and well-to-do ease of village and country life made them, are the theme.

The village as a social unit, then, is of no consequence to Miss Austen. Individual relations among people of the same class she draws minutely, but only in the most general and indirect way the relations between classes. So far as it goes, the suggestion is of a comfortable understanding between them: the people of wealth and position exercise a generous protection over the poor, and their

patronage is accepted as of equal pleasantness to recipient and patron. Whatever Miss Austen knew of the hardships and the peculiar problems of country people, these formed no part of the scheme of life which she chose for representation. Perhaps nothing is more significant than just this fact,—that there was ready to the hand of a recording artist a country society so slightly touched by a consciousness of the trend of events in national life, whether of village, city, or nation. There is none of Scott's strong nationality in her work: she did not write, and her characters do not act, with any sense of the continuity of their lives with the lives of past generations of English people, or under any glamor of national ideals or achievement. It is a singularly self-contained and complacent society, this of the English country gentry, and a contemplation of it, as presented in the Austen novels, helps one to understand how it was possible for so many crying ills in country life to go uncorrected for so many years. Fielding's novels are in the same sense without nationality of tone, but the fact that Fielding dealt with the lower class of people as well as with country gentry brought him into contact with many of the sterner aspects of country life, and gave his work greater breadth as well as closer connection with the main currents in national affairs. It remains true, however, that the novels of Jane Austen are an invaluable possession on the ground of their social implications as well as on that of their incomparable art.

Sir Walter Scott's connection with the village is slighter than Miss Austen's, and of a very different nature. Greatly as he admired the fine perfection of her work he found in it no suggestion for himself. He never cared to make a single class his only theme in any novel, and least of all would he have been drawn to the humdrum commonplaceness of Miss Austen's middle class. But Maria Edgeworth's portrayal of Irish peasant life, to which, in the following out of Miss Burney's lead in the novel of manners, she had been drawn by the accident of circumstances, suggested to him a congenial field. It is superfluous to remark on Scott's familiarity and sympathy

with the peasantry of his own country. A man who pursued with such zest the ballad literature and folk lore of earlier generations among his countrymen, could not be indifferent to the life of lowly people in his own age. And the great romancer was, in fact, as keenly alive as any realist to the "tragedies and tales" that were being lived out under the roofs of village cottages. Once at least he is described as looking down upon the village lying below Melrose and remarking on the "real romance" doubtless going on within it, beyond "all the fiction that was ever spun out of human brains." It is not strange that Scott should have said, in his generous admiration of Miss Edgeworth, that he would undertake to do for Scotland what she had done for Ireland. But the realism of life unmixed with its romance, ordinary events unrelieved by the heroic and unusual, had no attraction for him. In every novel he deals with the whole range of society, from peasant to lord; he wrote no novel of lowly life by itself.

The village with Scott, therefore, was just an incidental part of that great picture which his imagination constructed of a living people whose past was persisting in its present. As the Introduction to *The Antiquary* gave evidence, Scott wished to exhibit the national character as it expressed itself in individuals of humble station. And though his sketches of villages are in the main anything but beautiful, the characters which he depicts as connected with village life are some of his best. The hamlet of Tully-veolan, in *Waverley*, for example, is wretchedly sordid. A narrow, unpaved street straggles up the hill, with miserable hovels of cottages following its course unevenly. Ragged children play neglected in the street, whence they are snatched from beneath the feet of horses by scolding grand-dams. The village still has its unenclosed common field, where each man's patch of ground is so small, that the whole field looks like a tailor's pattern book. Small "yards" separate the cottages. In this village even curiosity, says Scott, that "busiest passion of the idle," has a listless cast. Yet despite all this, Scott sees in the people gravity, not

stupidity; poverty and indolence are here combining to depress a race naturally hardy, intelligent, and reflective. All his portrayal of the Scottish peasantry, in that realistic phase of his work to which the village pertains, bears out this judgment.

With Scott the village came into connection with the historical romance,—and the term may be used without inconsistency, since even in his transcription of the facts of the life about him in his own day Scott found a place for the romantic,—and it was to come later into closer and closer connection with historical fiction. Mrs. Hamilton, whose *Cottagers of Glenburnie* Scott refers to in the *Heart of Midlothian** in such a way as to indicate his admiration for the faithfulness of her portrayal of the inferior classes among the Scottish people, had already turned to a period slightly earlier than her own for her material. In 1821 John Galt, under the name of the Rev. Micah Balwhidder, published his *Annals of the Parish*, the chief one in a series of studies of Scottish common life. The book at once challenges comparison with *The Vicar of Wakefield*, from which it must have taken sundry hints, since it is the story of fifty years in a country parish, told by the guileless and amiable old clergyman himself. But the Rev. Micah is considerably less grand a character than Dr. Primrose, with a self-conceit away beyond the reach of the Vicar, as will appear from a glimpse at his first and introductory chapter.

To explain the nature of his book the Rev. Mr. Balwhidder recounts briefly the history of his incumbency in the parish of Dalmailing. (The village is a Scottish one, and hence the faith is Presbyterian.) He was placed and settled in the year 1760; in 1810, at the earnest and not altogether unresisted solicitations of the Session, he accepted of a “helper” in his charge. On the last Sabbath of the year, therefore, he preached his farewell sermon, with which most of the first chapter is taken up. After describing the profound impression which this discourse produced upon his audience, Mr. Balwhidder declares his purpose to make a faithful account of his

* Chapter 10.

ministry, year by year, in order to bear witness to the work of a beneficent Providence. The man's simplicity, his garrulousness (skillfully suggestive of age), and his utterly unconscious self-satisfaction come out delightfully in the account he gives of the parallel between his own history and that of "his Sacred Majesty King George, the third of the name," who came to his crown and kingdom in the same year, and on the same day of the same month, on which Mr. Balwhidder was settled minister of Dalmailing. So striking a coincidence could not but impress all observers, and it was very naturally and properly remarked that in all human probability the two men, being thus united in their trusts and temporalities, were pre-ordained to fade and flourish in fellowship together. Consequently when his Most Excellent Majesty was "set by as a precious vessel which had received a crack or a flaw, and could only be serviceable in the way of an ornament," the event was a sign to Mr. Balwhidder. And although reluctant to consent to give way to a successor, he was so moved by the loving consideration of his people for his comfort, and by the sign given him "in the removal of the royal candlestick from its place," that he yielded.

As the character of Mr. Balwhidder may be said to have been flatter than that of Dr. Primrose, so is his narrative. It is without the romantic quality of the earlier book; its incidents are those of the most ordinary every day, in their very tediousness truthful. The literal, wooden-minded Mr. Balwhidder is not without a sense of fun, but the humor of the story consists largely in the unconscious self-revelation of the man. From the day of his "placing" in the parish, when, as he recounts with grave unsuspectingness though with some resentment, a certain wag of a minister spoiled the solemnity of the laying on of hands by touching the young minister's head with his staff (being unable to reach otherwise), remarking jocosely, "timber to timber," to the day when he closes his narrative with a looking forward to the time when he shall join on high the old and long-departed sheep of his flock, "especially the first and second Mrs.

Balwhidders," his character is unfolded by his own naïve recital. With all his slowness of wit, however, he was a man of shrewd practical sense and warm sympathies, and his narrative has the interest attaching to accurate observation and detailed report.

Through fifty-one chapters, one for each year of his service, the old minister carries the story of his parish, gathering up into it the events, large and small, of his whole flock. Some years furnish forth but a brief chronicle, as for example 1770, when smuggling (the minister's great trial) had about died out in the parish, rumors of rebellion in America were still faint and distant, and nothing more exciting happened than the introduction of a fair into the village and the first appearance of a Punch show which set all the "laddie weans" to squeaking and singing like Punch for weeks after. Other years were heavier, as 1777, when the war cloud hung low over the village, recruiting had taken some of the best youth of the place, and even the children must play soldier, to the great grief of their peace-loving minister; floods came and did great damage, and the minister himself suffered personal affliction in the death of a first cousin of the second Mrs. Balwhidder. The fifty years show a gradual growth in worldliness within the parish. In 1761 the questionable habit of tea-drinking began to prevail, indulged in silyly at first, but gaining ground, and finally accepted by the minister himself, who, discovering tea to be a very desirable breakfast beverage, began to observe more particularly its virtues as a drink that "did no harm to the head of the drinkers." In 1787 jelly was first made in the parish, occasioning the minister some uneasiness,—but jelly was discovered to be very healing to a sore throat, and it too was pleasantly domesticated at Dalmailing. In 1788 a cotton mill invaded the region, bringing the stir of new activity and increase of worldly prosperity, and the establishment of a town in the vicinity of Dalmailing. A stage-coach followed, then a public-house, and a book-seller's shop, and all in all the remote little place felt its full share of the commercial prosperity of the time.

With the coming of the war in 1793 came also the calamity of division in the parish, government men and Jacobins being arrayed in bitterness against each other. It was no time, as Mr. Balwhidder saw, for exposition of the mysteries of the faith, and he shrewdly took up instead all the much vaunted new doctrines of benevolence, philanthropy, and utility, and showed how they were nothing but old-fashioned Christian virtues seen under different names. Among his own people Mr. Balwhidder was able to combat the prevalent evils successfully, because his people worked in the purity of free air; but among the sedentary cotton weavers of the new community the new ideas were hard to check. The fear of French invasion, difficulties in trade, a schism in the church brought about by advanced thinkers among the weavers, the death of the second Mrs. Balwhidder and the prudential marrying of the third, happy and tragic events among the individuals of the parish,—so the chronicle proceeds.

Quite evidently the *Annals of the Parish* is a new thing in the literature of the village. It is the story of a community in a different sense from that of any earlier document. The *Vicar of Wakefield* was the experience of one family and their few friends and neighbors; the *Parish Register* was a series of separate stories of different people. This is the account of a little inland village from a comparatively unimproved state in 1760 to the greater refinement and intelligence and prosperity of 1810. This historical aspect gives it a unique interest, though even without this it is a very readable book in its narrative of human life. It contains many of the stock characters of village descriptions,—school-mistress, daft Jenny, the brave youth who went for a soldier, and so on,—but they are there not as literary stock characters, but as members of a very real village community, and they are given a good deal of individual distinctness. The book is one of those which frequently reward with a pleasant hour or two the searcher among half forgotten things. From 1820 to 1826 Galt produced one book a year, all dealing with some aspect of village life,—itself an evidence that

the village was making claim to a place in prose literature.

At this time also the prose tale or short story of the country and the country village was rife. Most of these tales have disappeared except for their titles left standing in book-sellers' catalogues, but one illustration will show something of what they were, and tales in verse give a credible hint of their nature. In *Blackwood's* for April, 1820, appeared *The Snow Storm*, signed "Eremus." It is a highly sentimental and moral story, in which the daughter of a moorland cottager, returning home from farmer's where she is out at service, is overtaken by a furious storm, and is rescued from it by the farmer's son, her undeclared lover. The girl's old father, who had set out in search for his daughter, is likewise rescued, and they all make their difficult way to the cottage on the moor. After various faintings and resuscitations of mother and daughter, all enjoy a "strengthening meal" and family devotions together. William declares his love for Hannah, and the old couple joyfully hear that her future is secure. He departs for his home to allay the possible anxiety of his parents on his account, while Hannah lies down to sleep "dreaming of one now dearer to her than all on earth but her parents."

It is not a village story at all, but a story of the lonely cottage on the moor. Yet it is not unfitly taken account of here, since many of the stories under village names have scarcely more of the village life in them than this, and since the spirit which inspired it is that which lay behind very much of the treatment of villagers. "I have a short and simple story to tell," says "Eremus," but one "which may haply please those hearts whose delight it is to think on the humble underplots that are carrying on in the great drama of life." He assumes that he is not alone in his interest in these lowly actors. "If we would know what the summer or what the winter yields for enjoyment or trial to our country's peasantry" then we "must know them by their firesides, and make ourselves acquainted with the powerful ministry of the seasons" in their lives.*

* Patrick Brontë's prose tales have already been noticed in connec-

How widespread was the impulse here recognized to know the lives of the lower classes, and particularly of the peasantry, is indicated by current criticism of such poets as Bloomfield, Clare, and Barnes. Christopher North urged Clare to write as fully as Bloomfield had done of the lives of the peasant folk he knew (and whom he must know even more intimately than Bloomfield had known the peasantry of Suffolk), since the world needed the knowledge such poetry would supply. Here is the ideal of brotherhood concretely expressed. Fifty years before, few Englishmen suspected that the nation had anything to learn about its peasantry, or that the sentiment of brotherhood needed any building up in the land. Since that time the idea of the brotherhood of man had possessed men's minds, at first with a mere vague idealism, then with a more direct reference to the facts of life. Here it is on the solid ground of reliable information concerning those facts. Sentiment, even sentimentality, often marred the truth of presentation, so that George Eliot could write in 1856 a sharp arraignment of English literature for its weakly sentimental and false picture of the English peasant.* But the social and humanitarian value of truth in the presentation of country life was clearly asserted as early as the twenties, and had been growing in recognition from a much earlier time. Wordsworth's influence of course told inestimably in this direction.

In this same decade the jovial crew headed by Christopher North was writing of all sorts of things in their concert performance in *Blackwood's*, and among these things,—quite inevitably, since the Ettrick Shepherd was one of the group,—was the country and its people. In March, 1825, a conversation on Pastoral Poetry discusses a question implicit in the literature of country life, and sure to come some time to open discussion, the question with his poems, to which they bear a close relation. They represent the distinctively religious strain, as directly designed for teaching of adults as was Bowles's *Villager's Verse Book* for the teaching of children.

* *The Natural History of German Life*: Riehl. *Westminster Review*, 1856.

of realism and idealism in art. Hogg is talking of Ramsay. With all due admiration for Ramsay, the Shepherd favors a more realistic treatment; he would have more variety of incidents and characters and passions,—“mair fun, and frolic, and daffin—in short, mair o’ what you, and the like o’ you, ca’ coarseness,”—and above all a more natural and “wise-like” catastrophe. He would have the characters real peasants, not turning out Sirs and Lords at the end of the play. He would have some of the upper classes introduced for the sake of contrast, and especially would have for the sake of its own intrinsic attractiveness the picture of a perfect and polished Scotch gentleman of the old school.

This liking for reality is that which in a later day became the dominant rather than the occasional mood. Not beauty only,—at least in the limited sense of that word,—but reality and vital force, was what Hogg wanted. On one occasion * he had been telling a riotous tale of the cutting of the bag of a great haggis during grace, and of its running all over the table and the floor in an unbelievably enveloping volume. When the laughter had subsided North remarked thoughtfully that if this very tale were printed there would probably not be wanting people to call it coarse. “Nae doubt,” the Shepherd assented with scorn. “Everything nat’ral, and easy, and true, is ca’d coorse. . . . And what has been the consequence of sic puling criticism? Wishy-washy water-colors, sae faint that you canna tell a tree frae a tether, or a dowg frae a soo, or a man frae a woman.”

Then at the suggestion that Theocritus has been called coarse, the Shepherd made particular application of his doctrine in contrasting pictures of city and of country life. By what strange assumption of right could any *city* body charge any *country* body with coarseness? “Thank God, Mr. North, the fresh airs o’ heaven blow through your shepherd’s hut, and purify it frae pollution.” And he becomes so involved in his picture of the filth and pestilence of the town and so carried away by his feeling of its hideousness and the degradation of its people, that

* June, 1826.

he almost forgets the point of it all. But he recalls himself, and paints another picture, one "o' the harmless life and conversation o' us shepherds amang the braes, and within the murmurs o' the sheep-washing Yarrow."

Hogg's two scenes went unchallenged by his hearers, though he had chosen the most loathsome and degraded aspects of city life to oppose to the untainted beauty of nature in the country, an obviously unfair comparison. Yet the thing that Hogg meant, though he left his argument with the point unmade, is probably true. Coarseness for coarseness, the country, Hogg would say, has the advantage over the city. That of the country is a healthy kind of coarseness; it is open to the purifying influences of morning sunlight on glimmering water-falls, of "a' the larks awa up wi' their sangs to heaven—a' the linties low down i' the broom wi' theirs." And it is this coarseness of the open air and the simple life that Hogg would have presented in its reality, as a natural and true and even appealing element in the existence of country folk.

Hogg's attitude is not Crabbe's,—at least not that of the Crabbe of the *Village*; there Crabbe was writing in a spirit of defiance, resenting the falseness of what was customarily said of the country, and a spirit of championship of country people, whose hardship and suffering cried out for recognition and acknowledgment. Realism to him was a moral demand. To the Ettrick Shepherd it was an æsthetic opportunity. Not as a propagandist or a reformer did he advocate realness, but as an artist. *Life* is the artist's theme, and over-refinement and timid delicacy result in a mere pale shadow instead of reality.

In the literature of country life Hogg's attitude was not the usual one. Ballads in general presupposed it, and Burns took it as a matter of course. But Cowper's faithful pictures were drawn with a conscious moral purpose; Swift's brutally coarse ones in the spirit of satire; Somerville's rough sketches as burlesque. Other writers were for the most part not realists at all, but creators of the ideal or the idyllic. It remained for George Eliot to give the greater depth and fervor of her richer nature to Hogg's theory, informing it with her passionate desire to further

the intimate knowledge of the human spirit, to the enrichment and ennoblement of all life. Her vigorous and entertaining comments in an essay of 1856 reviewing two studies of German peasant life by Riehl,* contain an expression of her view together with her condemnation of the sentimentally unreal English peasant of stage and novel. And her own novels of the village and the country, following a few years later, afford a concrete demonstration of her theory.

Other conversations in the *Noctes* work out other aspects of the matter. Wordsworth's dictum as to characters of country people has yet left room for dispute, and Tickler, with his usual dogmatism, asserts: "Dramas of which the scenes are laid in the country cannot be good, for the people have no character." The Shepherd comes back with a quick reply: "You see, Sir, you're just perfectly ignorant o' what you're talkin' about—for it's only kintra-folk that has ony character ava,—and town's-bodies seem to be a' in a slump." In the heat of controversy he even goes so far as to maintain that there are not any passions at all in cities, save envy and back-biting and conceitedness. In the country, in solitary places, the sight of a human face always brings with it a corresponding feeling of some kind,—indifference is impossible. Tickler asks incredulously if James would seriously have North write dramas about the loves of the lower orders—men in corduroy breeches, and women in linsey-woolen petticoats. The tone of superiority arouses the Shepherd's indignation: "Wha are ye, Sir, to speak of the lower orders?" He continues with crushing references to the lower orders now in eternal bliss who will sit above Tickler and Mr. North in the realms o' heaven! Also to the "agonies that wring the souls o' lowly born," and so on. Poor Tickler takes it hard to be thought indifferent to these things. Finally the Shepherd grasps his hand in relenting and says: "We're baith i' the right; for I agree wi' you that nae hero o' tragedy or a Yepic should be brought forrit ostentatiously in corduroy breeks, and that, I suppose, is a' you intended to say." That was not

* *Op. cit.*

quite all, probably, but the compromise was a comfortable one, and the topic was dropped.

Thorough-going democracy in letters is a difficult attainment, however, and James has his own discrimination to make. He maintains that characters in books should be either kings, princes, and nobles, or shepherds, peasants, farmers, and the like, including "most of our working people." The intermediate class is not worth the Muse's while, because their life is made up chiefly of manners; you "canna see the human creturs for their claes." Sad outlook for Arnold Bennett,—and sad verdict on Jane Austen!

As has already appeared, the mood of reminiscence is strong in poems of village life, from Goldsmith down. Along with scenes of home life come those closely associated scenes of the village which belong to childhood almost as intimately as the remembrances of household and home. The familiar, personal essay, so striking a development of the early nineteenth century, easily falls into this vein and makes use of this material. It would have been strange if the village had not found a place for itself in the new essay, with its descriptions, its recollections, its intimate glimpses of human experience, its feeling for the value of nature in men's lives. Addison had long before written perfect essays of the objective type, dealing with country society, but his example was now to be followed up by essays of equally faithful observation and the added coloring of personality. Unfortunate for the village that Lamb was an "inveterate Londoner!"

Curiously the first essayist of importance to treat of English village life is an American. Washington Irving's *Sketch Book* was written in England, published first in separate papers in America, and then brought out in collected form in England as well as in America. It belongs to the years 1819 and 1820. The papers were written for an American audience, and it was only because they seemed certain to appear in a pirated edition in England that Irving himself produced them there. So gracious and admiring a picture of England and English

life, however, could not but command a welcome from Englishmen. Indeed, Irving seems scarcely less English than American in the *Sketch Book*, so sympathetic is his appreciation of old England and so thoroughly in line with English literary tradition and style is his work. His affectionate commemoration of old customs passing and clung to tenaciously by the older generation to whom association has endeared them, is an echo of what has been sounding through all the poetry of the thirty years preceding. The sentiment in his stories of *The Broken Heart*, *The Widow and her Son*, and *The Pride of the Village*, is the same as that in the poems of "Delta" and many others, but without the mawkishness of sentimentality which was too frequent in such pieces. *Rural Funerals* perhaps comes a little too near to the mood of those "who do enjoy to weep" to be quite relished to-day, but it was congenial to its own time. The series of sketches presenting the life within the hall of the English country gentleman of the best type has hardly a parallel anywhere, certainly nowhere in its own day.

Particularly valuable is Irving's study of *Rural life in England*. His picture is altogether roseate, and his feeling for the moral significance of the beauty that he paints is profound and true. To one who has been reading with attention a large body of literature dealing with country life, there is more than meets the eye in some of the things Irving notes without comment. Conspicuous among these things is his revelation of the growing division between gentry and peasantry. "We have almost lost," said the old Squire, "our simple true-hearted peasantry. They have broken asunder from the higher classes, and seem to think their interests are separate. They have become too knowing, and begin to read newspapers, listen to ale-house politicians, and talk of reform." And the remedy the old Squire proposed was that nobility and gentry should pass more time on their estates, mingle more among the country people, and "set the merry old English games going again." The pathetic futility of his remedy, and the strength of the forces arrayed against him, he did not suspect. Did Irving? One recalls Eben-

ezer Elliott's comparison of the dense ignorance of the laborer on the soil with the intellectual possibilities open to the city laborer, notes the old Squire's distrust of newspapers and talkers, and regrets—not so much the passing of the old content of the peasant—but the slightness of hope for his acquiring a new and more intelligent content.

Except in an occasional passing mood, no one feels inclined to object to that truth of which we are so often assured (most insistently, perhaps, by the young) that every age must write its own books. But there come times when one wishes that every age were not obliged to write so many of its own books that it leaves itself no time to read various rare and choice things of preceding ages. Doubtless a crusade to revive Miss Mitford and make *Our Village* a best seller would be a trifle fantastic, but only for its inevitable failure, not for any unworthiness in the cause. In 1824 Miss Mitford began these unpretentious sketches of the village in which she lived, and after the lapse of a century they are still as fresh and human, as delicately vivacious and as exquisitely homely as they were when she sat down in the little village to write of it for the world far away. By the side of them Washington Irving seems heavy and settled and middle-aged; at least the *Sketch Book* suggests beef and plum pudding and Christmas feasting and an old-established order. *Our Village* calls up a lovely landscape,—a broad winding road with a green waste on each side, two pretty cottages at unequal distances, and the village beyond, with its mass of roofs and clustered chimneys peeping through the trees; it suggests a gay road, with carts and post-chaises, and girls in red coats, and away in the distance the nearing coach. It reminds us of saucy, idle, clever, good-natured village boys, for whom, in spite of the common prediction of no good end ahead of them, Miss Mitford confesses a strong predilection. It calls up cricket matches, and village love affairs, the village shop, the schoolmaster and the blacksmith, and the shoemaker of unbudging industry. Never before had the village been so minutely pictured, or so fully, or with such delicate art.

Miss Mitford's attitude toward her theme is expressed in her Preface, where she asserts that if she has given a brighter aspect to her villagers than is usually met with in books, she can not help it, and would not if she could. She has painted her pictures in the intense and thankful conviction that "in every condition of life, goodness and happiness may be found by those who seek them, and never more surely than in the fresh air, the shade, and the sunshine of nature." Her assurance that she has written "with the closest and most resolute fidelity to the place and the people" is confirmed by the perfect lifelikeness of her portrayal. No people could be more real; and the author's sympathy with them never betrays her into sentimentality. Her story of the Vicar's pretty maid is one of superstition and tragedy. The girl married a sailor, and shortly after he had gone to sea was obliged by an accident to her hand to have her wedding ring sawed from her finger; the superstitious terror inspired by this event drove her into illness, which became a decline as months passed and the probability grew that her husband had been lost at sea; when at length he returned, weak and worn by hardship, in the shock of his arrival the poor young wife died. It is such a story as we have found elsewhere in village literature, but it is quite without the prevailing sentimentality. The actors are real people, and their unhappy history is told with a simple sincerity that commands both credence and sympathy.

Miss Mitford's parish was still unenclosed,—a fact which she rejoiced in not for economic reasons, but because these "delicious green patches, islets of wilderness amidst cultivation," form perhaps the peculiar beauty of English scenery. Some families of the village are thriftless and ragged and poor, others are prosperous and happy. On the whole, however, the air is bright over "our village." Poverty itself is no certain hardship; one family, with fourteen children of all ages and sizes, Miss Mitford would match for labor and laughter against any family in England. "They are very poor, and I often wish them richer; but I don't know—perhaps it would

put them out." Yet the village has one sign of poverty which Miss Mitford can not dismiss so easily. It is a large heavy building on one side of the common, with a gloomy garden laid out in straight dark beds of vegetables,—not a flower or a flowering shrub, nothing but for sober melancholy use. That is the parish workhouse. "I always hurry past that place as if it were a prison," confesses Miss Mitford. By taking thought she is able to make the house suggest to her mind order, food, clothing, warmth, refuge, instead of restraint, age, illness, poverty, but the first "feeling, prejudice, will not be controlled." If the feeling was so strong in Miss Mitford, what must it have been in the poor? Nothing in the literature of the English village is so dark a blot as the "many window'd house whose light is gloom." Crabbe bears abundant evidence that even when its inmates acknowledged its ministry to their material comfort, they shuddered under its walls, because it was, after all, "the House."

Miss Mitford joins in the general outcry against the farmer's girl who sits before a tinkling piano. The piano must have been uniformly inferior, or the farmer's girl a uniformly poor performer, in those days, for she never pleases. In reality it was nothing more than the "new-fangledness" of it that met objection, no doubt. Miss Mitford is orthodox too in asserting the times to be "declining," but she is rather vague on the subject, and offers some evidence that thrift and industry will take a man to success in spite of the times. There is the rich miller, for instance, whose richness Miss Mitford enjoys, but whose replacing of his lovely old irregular cottage by an ugly square red brick, "a boiled lobster of a house," she holds as a grievance sore. Surely Miss Mitford must have been outside the storm of hardships that beat upon the laborers of the soil during the years she was writing these sketches: they are too true, too sympathetic, to have been written in defiance of real suffering going on within her knowledge.

Miss Mitford's work called forth some interesting responses, among them a mock-pastoral by Thomas

Hood, *Rural Felicity*, published in the *Comic Annual* of 1839. In 1836 an anonymous writer issued a series of prose papers under the title *Village Sayings and Doings; or, My Village versus "Our Village,"* and prefaced it by a bit of jesting verse, of which these are two lines:

"For village life is not all à la Mitford,
Or else, 'tis very plain that I'm unfit for 't."

Great as was the general admiration for her work, the idyllic village she drew was not accepted without some half-serious protest against its idyllicism.

Miss Mitford's sketches, like William Barnes' poems, are outside the main current of English thought concerning the political and economic elements of village life. This separation of the æsthetic and individual for literary representation appears in relief against such a book as *Wise Saws and Modern Instances*, a set of stories by Thomas Cooper, the "Chartist poet." Its combination of themes, settings, and characters shows the village in close relation to the larger national life, as their author, a self-educated man belonging to the world of industry and involved in the political movement of Chartism, would naturally see it. Some of the stories are of village life, and some of town life among manufacturers: some of "old Lincolnshire," endeared to Cooper by the associations of thirty years, and some of "new Lincolnshire," with its "manufacturing-misery."

Cooper claimed for his sketches no merit beyond that of naturalness combined with truth, but this merit, at least, they possess in high degree. His figures from village circles are like those we have seen elsewhere, but they are made individual. There is "Kucky" (short for Habakkuk) Sarson, the village barber, who preached "French principles" until circumstances revealed to him that his advanced views were only theory, whereupon he was honest and courageous enough to modify them. "Raven Dick," the poacher, learned from experience,—not a modification of his views as to the injustice of the game laws, but a more cautious expression of them. There is

the young sailor who gave his life for another's, a type of the true English sailor, generous, daring, capable of exalted sacrifice; and there is the old sailor, allowed to die in the poorhouse, his "bold old heart" broken with the disgrace of his presence there. Dorothy Pyecroft, a humble old village woman, teaches the new young parson his shallowness and worldliness in preaching the doctrine that charity begins at home. The writer has his fling at Calvinistic ideas and practice in two stories: that of the boy apprenticed in his native village to James Straitlace, and kept under such strict discipline that he seized the first opportunity to run away, and straightway become a thief; and that of Tim Swallow-whistle, the tailor in a small agricultural village, whose constant good temper and prosperity so outraged his neighbor Prim, the Puritan, "a great professor of sour-godliness," that the latter plotted and well-nigh achieved the tailor's ruin.

These descriptive names suggest type figures, but in the main the characterization is that of individual people. Davy Lidgitt, for example, is a very real boy and his experience such as would inevitably grow out of his character and the circumstances of his life. He was a keen, shrewd youth, wild in his ideas, unpractical and improvident, and allowed to grow up without discipline or wise restraint. His father took him to the "wise man" of the village, from whom he drew the easy prediction that Davy would "bring his nine-pence to naught." Davy inherited his father's money, spent it all, and finally, reduced to asking parish aid, was set to break stones on the road. The "wise man," by the way, or "cunning man," as he is sometimes called, is an old, standing figure in village life.* All the villagers trusted and consulted him, and he divined (though they did not suspect it) merely by a shrewd casting up of circumstances and appearances, and did it with remarkable accuracy. He often "cast their nativities" without even consulting

* Rousseau's *Le Devin du Village*, 1753, appeared in English under the title *The Village Conjuror* in 1767. The "conjuror" is exactly of the type of the "wise man" of Cooper's piece and many others, down to the stories of Eden Phillpotts.

books and almanacs, though sometimes he resorted to these learned appearances.

Merrie England—No More! is of interest in bearing out Ebenezer Elliott's comparison of the ignorant and stolid peasantry in agricultural counties and the "starving manufacturing masses" who discuss theology and government and political economy with surprising subtlety. Cooper is very like Elliott in his enjoyment of people and his interest in problems of labor.

In the social life of England for half a century the overwhelming fact was the growth of industrialism, its encroachment upon the country, and the transformation of England from an agricultural to an industrial nation. The process was a very long one, continuous from an early period with the growth of the capitalistic system, but hastened tremendously in the eighteenth century and completed in the nineteenth, to the absorption of much of the attention of writers and thinkers. Religion and education and politics, all were affected by it. It was not the only force, to be sure, in English development, but on the social side of English life it was the dominant one.

The part of the villager in this transformation of England was made conspicuous in the treatment of the village by writers throughout the age, as it had begun to be in the late years of the eighteenth century. With many writers it was the dominating idea, and none could wholly ignore it. Yet the detachment from economic and political considerations seen in Miss Mitford and in Barnes became more and more usual in the literature of the village as the novel of industry and town life developed in the mid-century. Interest in industrial questions centered itself increasingly in the city, while the village was given over to a treatment in which the psychology of a small community—the simplicity, naïveté, freshness, and vigorous, unspoiled individuality of its people—absorbed attention. Mrs. Gaskell made her industrial novel *Mary Barton* (1848) the story of a manufacturing city, while in *Cranford* she drew the picture of an untroubled village life, the very incarnation of remoteness from affairs. In her *North and South* the village appeared as the antithesis of the town in

beauty and peacefulness; in *Sylvia's Lovers* and in *Ruth* the village is the setting for stories in which in one case a national political policy and in the other a generally accepted social standard play determining parts, but in which the prime interest is the drama of individual lives.

So with George Eliot. *Silas Marner* is a record of village life untroubled by anything except the influences which act upon human experience everywhere. *Adam Bede* touches upon a religious movement of national significance but, as in *Middlemarch* and *The Mill on the Floss*, its problems are those of individual life and character, developing, to be sure, under the influence of a certain social environment, but not involving any questions of social policy. When George Eliot gives her attention to political and economic matters, she sets her scene in a town, as in *Felix Holt*. Kingsley's *Yeast*, 1851, is the exception to this general trend, but its concern with the problems of the agricultural laborer divides attention with a consideration of religious questions.

The period marked out for consideration in this study comes to a close just on the eve of the work of George Eliot, who marks in many ways the culmination of a century's development. The village community had been made the subject of literary handling since the time of Goldsmith, from various points of view and with different purposes and methods. Never had it been portrayed with the fullness which George Eliot gave to her picture. She took the whole little village world as it stood, with aristocracy, clergy, middle and lower classes all inter-related in their fortunes, and portrayed its humor, its pathos, its common every-dayness, its shallowness and its depth, in a series of powerful dramas. She had Goldsmith's appreciation of quaint, lovable, strongly marked characters; she had Crabbe's passion for truth; she had Wordsworth's seriousness, with more than his range of observation and with humor added to his pathos, and the attitude of a positivist replacing that of the mystic: altogether she was almost ideally equipped to carry on and develop the tradition of the village in English literature.

But the village she portrayed was not that of her own day,—a significant fact. To find the state of society that furnished forth the life and character which she wished to present she had to go back fifty years or so. *Mr. Gilfil's Love Story* was represented as beginning in the year 1788; *Adam Bede* in 1799; *Silas Marner* in the middle of the war with France; *The Mill on the Floss* and *Middlemarch* belonged to the reign of George the Fourth.* In this going back to an earlier period George Eliot is like other writers of her time. Since her day very many novels have been written of the age which she presented, dealing with various aspects of country life, but she remains the best of its painters. Of our own day perhaps nothing is more significant than the fact that poets and novelists find their best material and inspiration in the life immediately about them, its beauty and its ugliness, its problems and its hopes.

* See George Eliot's comment on the change in the meaning of the term "peasant" in England in her article on Rhiel, already quoted.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION: LOOKING FORWARD

The village of literature changed greatly during the course of a century, in response to changing conditions, and with a growing knowledge and sympathy on the part of writers. By 1850 it was no longer a place of idyllic beauty and charmed life, where "strong Labour" and "contented Virtue" dwelt in unbroken peace; it had become a real flesh-and-blood, stone-and-timber village, still beautiful, still quiet and rose-embowered, but the abode of a people whose lives encompassed both happy and sad in a range of experience normal to human life everywhere.

The change meant limitless possibilities, and the picture of the village has grown steadily in truthfulness and variety and completeness. Its *dramatis personæ* have remained much the same, though with differences in presentment. The blacksmith, indispensable in early village life and a figure attractive to the imagination, with his great strength and his dramatically picturesque setting of dark shop and blazing forge, has remained an almost unvarying figure, until now the mechanic and chauffeur bid fair to drive him from his ancient place. The miller, associated very fundamentally with the life of the early village, has long ago vanished, swallowed up in a system, and wheel-wright, wain-wright, and weaver, always less prominent, have gone with him. Cobbler and tailor remain, but without distinctive traits. The lawyer, almost uniformly a rascal in the earlier treatment, and always looked upon with some suspicion by villagers, who found his wits a little too shrewd for their perfect comfort, has lost this type-character, and become, as have also the schoolmaster and the parson, an individual, now of one sort and now of another. The old apothecary, ignorant and callous and dishonest, long ago became the

doctor, and has reached his apotheosis, perhaps, in the splendid Dr. MacClure of Ian MacLaren's little Scottish village. The little shopkeeper came in with the going out of the pedlar, and collier and iron worker have taken their place by ploughman and reaper.

Other figures, marked not by vocation but by some other relation to the community, are to be noticed. Soldier and sailor, prominent in village life during the period of the long wars, dropped out of sight with the coming of peace, though now and then commemorated by some mindful patriot. Officials, like warden and beadle and clerk, remain, but in sadly diminished glory. Certain types of character, irrespective of occupation or office, persist; the "cunning man" seems doomed, as the light of modernism penetrates slowly into the darkness of village superstition, but it is hard to believe that even the efficiency expert, if ever he sets profaning foot within the English village, will succeed in banishing the "handy man," who from time immemorial has done the odd jobs of the whole community—except his own household. Other things may come and go, but this invaluable man's lazy busy-ness will surely remain, a blessing to the community—except, again, his own household.

Some of the old themes have disappeared or taken on new character. There are no more May-day revels, and even the lament over their passing has almost died out, with the futile attempt at reviving them, though occasional regret is expressed for the absence or the unhappy nature of amusement in modern village life. Hunting is not the thing it once was: instead of a glorious sport, redounding to the credit of England and bringing enjoyment to the onlooking villagers,—or, as sometimes, disaster to farmers,—it is now a thing to be either attacked or defended, holding a precarious place in the social life of England. There are still echoes of poaching and game laws, bound up with questions of land ownership, all now promising to merge in the great enveloping theme of war, in which village life is involved along with the life of all the world to-day.

In his religion, as in other things, the villager has al-

ways been much the creature of habit and tradition. For a long time, just when he needed it most, religion as administered by the church that his fates had provided for him had little to give him of consolation or hope or courage. When preachers were directing their efforts to showing that a belief in eternal punishment was wise because it could do no harm and might ensure safety in the event of its being true, or to demonstrating that the decree "sell all and give to the poor" did not mean anything too uncomfortably literal, the poor were just entering upon that chapter in their experience which was to demand of them a fortitude beyond the reach of such worldly and calculating wisdom. What wonder that the Methodist chapel sprang up beside the old village church, and that vicar and curate were forced to look to their flock? Yet there was something in the Englishman of lowly life that led him like his more aristocratic brethren often to distrust the new religion. He feared its emotionalism and its new-fangledness. A certain disreputable old cobbler, drinking and quarreling in the village tavern, expressed fears lest his wife was "turning Methody," a disgrace he apprehended he should be unable to endure.*

The characteristic religion of the villager is a sort of high, vague sentiment, bequeathed him from generations gone, expressing itself in religious observances that have for him this sanction of antiquity as well as the value of his own life-long and dear associations, and not to be too closely connected with mere morality. Mr. Maybold, the new young vicar in Hardy's *Under the Greenwood Tree*, was unnecessarily fussy in ruling that young men must not put their hats in the christening font during service, but his greater offense came in stirring them up as to their conduct,—“wanting them to be good and upright till 'tis carried to such a shameful pitch as I never see afore nor since.” “There's virtue,” said they, remembering their easy old vicar, “in a man's not putting a parish to spiritual trouble.” The farmers in Battersby-on-the-Hill, in Samuel Butler's *Way of All Flesh*, shared this sentiment: “they would have been equally horrified,” said Butler,

* *The Cobbler and his Creditors*, in *Analects in Verse and Prose*, 1770.

"at hearing the Christian religion doubted and at seeing it practiced." It is curious to see in such references as that to Mr. Maybold and the christening font, and to the encroachment of high church ideas and practice such as Theobald Pontifex combatted bitterly in his parish,* little backwaters of the tide that reached its height in the Tractarian Movement at Oxford.†

The morality of the villager was something like his religion, a matter of accepted standards and habits of action. It was a simple matter, not demanding theorizing or self-examination. A man must first of all do his work, do it honestly and with a sense of its value; he must live with his neighbors justly and decently; he must observe the laws of social uprightness; he must pay his rent and his tithes, and keep out of the poorhouse. These are robust virtues, not incompatible with considerable roughness of manner and even coarseness of feeling. Delicacy and gentleness are the products of a higher type of civilization than that which the villager knew. But the life of the agricultural laborer—and even in the later period he is the typical villager, the hero of the story—has been such as to demand more of the primitive virtues upon which human life is founded than are asked of any other man,—courage, hardihood, patience, self-sacrifice. So says Felix Freeland,‡—and Cowper, Burns, Bloomfield, Barnes, George Eliot bear witness that he is right.

This is not to make any absurd claim to perfection for villagers; only to say that their morality was such as grew naturally out of their way of life and the inherited sentiment of generations, and that it was on the whole sound and sufficient. The darker among the pictures of peasant character, such as Crabbe's in *The Village* or Kingsley's in *Yeast*, usually show a perversion or degeneration traceable to social conditions.

H. G. Wells, to be sure, holds a different opinion of the

* *The Way of all Flesh*.

† A writer in the *North British Review* for May, 1852, complained that in a certain book, as in many others written for the rural population, there was the "taint" of a ceremonial Christianity, the author being an "insidious tractarian."

‡ Galsworthy, *The Freelands*.

whole matter. Speaking through the thin disguise of a character in *Tono-Bungay* he expresses scornful disbelief in the inferiority of the English townsman to his agricultural cousin. "I've seen them both," he says, "when they didn't think they were being observed, and I know. There was something about my Wimblehurst companions that disgusted me; . . . they displayed a sort of sluggish, real lewdness,—lewdness is the word—a baseness of attitude. Whatever we exiled urbans did at Goudhurst was touched with something, however coarse, of romantic imagination. We had read the *Boys of England*, and told each other stories. In the English countryside there are no books at all, no songs, no drama, no valiant sin even. . . . It is because I know this that I do not share in the common repinings because our countryside is being depopulated, because our population is passing through the furnace of the towns. They starve, they suffer, no doubt, but they come out of it hardened, they come out of it with souls." *

If the courage to be openly sensual and profane is a virtue, it is a virtue that the English country has not always lacked. See Tom Jones and Peregrine Pickle; see Costard and Jacquenetta, Silvius and Phebe, Sir John Falstaff himself. For the whispering, insinuating, leering lewdness that he describes, Wells himself indicates the cause and implies the remedy. Country youth who have lost their simplicity and become sophisticated, and who still have no books, no drama, no songs, need not all be sent to town to be purified in an urban furnace; they may be given normal outlets and activities in the country. The actual wholesome influence of country living can scarcely be questioned; testimony to it is too universal and too convincing.† So profoundly does Galsworthy believe in the power of this influence that he declares through Cuthcott, a character in *The Freelanders*, that the

* *Tono-Bungay*, p. 79.

† Bourne, in *Change in the Village*, expressly notes the freedom of speech among men and women together in his village. "The talk sometimes becomes Chaucerian," but the average man has nothing to conceal or suggest; he says all freely, and it does not linger as a bad taste in the minds of hearers or speakers.

whole question of "the Land" is one of morals and religion. The discussion of world markets and "growing our own food" is beside the mark; in reality "the land stands or falls as a breeding ground of health and stamina and nothing else." To save the fast disappearing English peasant, says Galsworthy, only a revolution in the spirit of English education can avail, and England cannot long endure without land-bred men.

If the English peasant is going from the land, let us be grateful that we have him in literature as a permanent possession. George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Eden Phillpotts, all have gone back to an earlier day and given us portraits of the English rustic in his credulity, superstition, placidity, and shrewdness, with his oddities and grotesquenesses, his quaint, flavorful speech, his wise outlook upon life in his own small world,—pictures that we shall not willingly let die. George Eliot presents the drama of village life against the background of moral ideas; Phillpotts against the background of a dim, unmeasured antiquity in which "the phenomena of man's environment are as interesting as man himself"; Hardy sees individual lives, however humble and remote from the world, as part of the life of the race: "The lives of Marty and Giles seemed completely isolated and self-contained in the gray of the morning, yet were part of the pattern in the great web of human doings from the White Sea to Cape Horn." *

Antiquity and remoteness do not cease to be the distinguishing marks of the English village. Alexander Smith, in his essay *Dreamthorpe*,†—an essay which in itself would mark the appropriateness of the village theme to the personal essay,—dreams over the past of his beloved little village. The trade of the builder is unknown there; within his memory not a single stone has been laid on the top of another. The houses are all old, the apple trees are mossed and ancient, centuries have fallen upon Dreamthorpe and have left no trace: and to Alexander Smith "this commonplace sequence and flowing on of life

* *The Woodlanders*.

† London, 1863.

is immeasurably affecting." Humbler villagers, also, are susceptible to the charm of the old: in one of Phillpotts' villages stands an inn much beloved of the villagers as "a terrible ancient place." Their spirited resistance to innovations in village customs is not all dull conservatism; it rises in part from their feeling of desecration in the disturbance of that which has been hallowed and beautified by an immemorable age.

These characteristic features of English village life are brought out, with a multitude of incidents and a mass of interesting information, in certain books already several times referred to here, and deserving of further mention as more than mere scientific presentations of fact. Bourne's *Change in the Village* is invaluable to one interested in the fortunes of the English village either in or out of literature. It is the account of the writer's observations and experiences in a twenty years' residence in a certain south of England village. It is written with a strong personal interest in and understanding of the people of the village, and it has imaginative insight as well as accuracy of fact. Other books by Bourne complete the picture given in this. Closer to the category of pure literature are the books of W. H. Hudson, naturalist and traveller, who, brought up in South America, has tramped over England with the zest of an explorer and the love of an Englishman, and who knows English villages as few people to-day know them. His *Afoot in England* and *A Shepherd of the Hills* are not merely travels; they are history and criticism and poetry also.

Archibald Marshall's Trollope-like novels concern themselves with the country from the standpoint of the middle and upper classes, as did Jane Austen's. The gradual breaking down of the old feudal relations under the encroachments of city born and bred millionaires, who find much to learn in the unwritten tradition of the countryside where they buy estates and set themselves up as country gentlemen, and who bring a forward look into country affairs along with their half resented presence,—the passing of the old order, this is Marshall's chief theme. But in the midst of change he sees the old

life still going on: "from the squire in his hall to the labourer in his cottage, they were in relation to each other in much the same way as their forefathers had been, living much the same lives, doing much the same work, taking much the same pleasures. For the end of these things is not yet." A glance at the shadow of the great war cast over the mellowed and opulent English landscape gives prophecy that the end may be hastened.*

A more certain tone is that of Horace Annesley Vachell, in his novel *Fishpingle*,† which presents the distinct thesis (set forth explicitly in a preface) that either the country gentry or their old-fashioned feudal notions must go. Industry has come into the hands of experts: agriculture is still in the hands of amateurs, and is failing steadily and surely. The thesis is of interest in view of present conditions, and the novel, while not of the highest imaginative value, being somewhat borne down by its ideas, presents a vivid picture of rural England as a continuation of the England of, say, *Roger de Coverley*.

By far the most powerful and beautiful of the novels dealing with the economic aspect of present day village life, is Mr. Galsworthy's *Freelands*. With remarkable skill it gathers up in characters and events all the problems, all the points of view, all the suggested solutions of the vexed question of the English villager. It presents the villager himself as symbolic—"Tryst, the tragic fellow—the moving, lonely figure; emanation of these solitary fields, shade of the departing land!" Bob Tryst, the big, inarticulate, dogged, patient labourer, is no mere picturesque object in a beautiful landscape,—though he is that too, "swinging his broad hairy arm with the grace of strength;" he is no "rustic hind," whistling in gay content, the embodiment of peace and health and unspoiled virtue; he is rather the embodiment of an English social class, a race of men wrought close into the texture of England's being, a very part of the land that furnishes her life; he is the creature at once of the big and permanent forces of nature, and of the will of men placed by

* *Abington Abbey*, 1917.

† *New York*, 1917.

forces no less irresistible and inexplicable above him. He is a symbol of that irony that often pervades the country and its people: in nature peace, quiet beauty, strength, fulness of life,—in man toil, barrenness of soul, dumb suffering, helpless submission.

It is a tragic story that *The Freelands* tells, but not a hopeless one. Youth, attempting confidently to infuse its buoyancy and its spirit of resistance into a people incapable of these things, is defeated. But it is only a single defeat, and perhaps in a younger, freer land, victory is to be. So the prophetic spirit painted—"the world is changing, Felix, the world is changing."

And now the great change is upon us, and no one can see the end. Ten years ago Maurice Hewlett began an epic * on the only epic subject yet remaining to England, perhaps, the history of the English agricultural laborer. In 1913 he wrote his "argument": "A certain man, being in bondage to a proud Conqueror, maintained his customs, nourished his virtues, obeyed his tyrants, and at the end of a thousand years found himself worse off than he was in the beginning of his servitude. He then lifted his head, lookt his master in the face, and his chains fell off him." Hewlett had thought to end his chronicle of Hodge with the chapter of "Waterloo and Peterloo," and the signs of growing intelligence and independence manifested during these later years. Then came war, and in 1916 he wrote an "Envoy" narrating the surprising readiness with which Hodge had taken his place in battle beside his brothers. Hodge, knowing nothing of Balkan or of Turk, could understand the simple fact, "Belgium was free and now is not," and rose to arms. Never again can he go back to the old servitude or the old apathy. The old peasant life of the coöperative village may be gone forever, but its freedom, its courage and self-respect and dignity, must in some way return, as a part of what the great war is to give the world.

* *The Song of the Plow: being the English chronicle.* 1916.

APPENDIX

Snaith Marsh, a Yorkshire Pastoral

"Young Robin of the Plain, 'erst blithest Blade
That e'er with Sickle keen the Fields disray'd,
Who whist'ling drove the smoking Teem along,
Or trimm'd the thorny Fence, with rustic Song,
Thro' ev'ry Season busy, still, and gay,
He plough'd, he sow'd; he made, and stack'd the Hay,
Not dreary Winter reach'd to Robin's Breast,
He thrash'd, he winnow'd, and he crack'd his Jest.
But now, nor Spring's Return with Joy he sees,
Nor flowery Plain he heeds, nor budding Trees,
Nor Linnet warbling from the dewey Brakes,
Nor early Lark who tow'ring Circles takes,
Nor tuneful Thrushes from the Hedge that sing,
Nor the shrill Blackbird's Welcome to the Spring,
Against a Gate he leans in rueful Plight,
And eyes the Plain that late was *Snaith Marsh* hight.

Ah! wae is me, thus doleful 'gan he mourn:
Ah! wae the time, whenever I was born,
But far more wae'ful still that luckless Day,
Which with the Commons gave *Snaith Marsh* away,
Snaith Marsh, our whole Town's Pride, the poor Man's Bread,
Where, tho' no Rent he paid, his Cattle fed,
Fed on the sweetest Grass which here rife grew,
Common to all, nor Fence, nor Landmark knew,
Whose flowery Turf no crooked Share had raz'd,
Nor wide destroying Scythe its Green effac'd.
But now, ah! now, it stoops, sad seet I ween,
In mony a Row, with Rails suspended 'tween.

Wae warth the Day, when tic'd sure by old *Nick*,
All to grow rich at once, like Neighbour *Dick*,
To Town I high'd, and on a luckless Fair,
For Cattle here to graze, war'd all my Gear,
And boldly ventur'd at one Cast to buy,
A deft find breeding Mear, and newted Whye,
Ten ewes, a Tup, and more, a Flock of Geese,
All which I thought would here so fast increase,
That though they'd cost me all my worldly Store,
I rekenn'd soon to gain as mickle more,
But now *Snaith Marsh* 's taid, and all my Gain blown o'er.

My goodly Stock, e'er yet they tasted Food,
By cross-grain'd Hinds were driv'n from their Abode,

Tho' lest bad Neighbours might have ow'd me Spight,
 I fore-hand taid a House to give me Right,
 With bonny *Susan* where I hop'd to dwell,
 But now I prove that Proverb on mysell,
 Which says, that one Grief brings another on,
 Too sure, alas! and mine will ne'er have done,
 For *Susan*, whom I thought my Sweetheart true,
 When as my Crosses came, 'gan look askue;
 And what than all beside my Heart most pains,
 For landed *Roger*, now my Love disdains,
Roger, not to be nam'd with me, I trow,
 More than Muckmidden vile, with Barley Mow;
 But *Roger* has a House in yonder Lane,
 And my sad Loss proves ev'ry Way his Gain;
 Yet wilt thou, *Susan*? wilt thou, selfish Lass!
 For Sake of sordid Wealth, thy Love debase?
 No, do not think Content is in mich Store,
 But be to Robin kind, as heretofore,
 And we'll in Love be bless'd, tho' *Snaith Marsh* be no more.

Alas! will *Roger* e'er his Sleep forego?
 Afore Larks sing, or early Cock 'gin crow,
 As I've for thee, ungrateful Maiden, done,
 To help thee milking, e'er day-wark begun,
 And when thy well-stript Kye would yield no more,
 Still on my Head the reeking Kit I bore.
 And, oh! bethink thee, then, what lovesome Talk,
 We've held together ganging down the Balk,
 Maund'ring at Time which wou'd not for us stay,
 But now, I ween, mais no such Haste away.
 Yet, O! return eftsoon, and ease my Woe,
 And to some distant Parish let us go,
 And there again them leetsome Days restore,
 Where unassail'd by meety Folk in pow'r,
 Our Cattle yet may feed, tho' *Snaith Marsh* be no more.

But wae is me, I wot, I fand am grown,
 Forgetting *Susan* is already gone,
 And *Roger* aims at Lady-day to wed,
 The Bands last Sunday in the Church were bid;
 But let me, let me, first i' th' Churchyard lig,
 For soon I there must gang, my Grief's so big.
 All others in their Loss, some Comfort find,
 Tho' Ned's like me reduc'd, yet Jenny's kind,
 And tho' his Fleece no more our Parson takes,
 And roast Goose dainty Food, his Table lacks,
 Yet he for Tythes ill-paid, gets better Land,
 While I am ev'ry Way o' th' losing Hand:
 My Adlings war'd, and yet my Rent to pay,
 My Geese, like *Susan*'s Faith, flown far away,
 My Cattle, like their Master, lank and poor,
 My heart with hopeless Love to Pieces tore,
 And all these Sorrows came, syne *Snaith Marsh* was no more."

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